

Northern territories looking for extra child care funding ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The Nunavut government says the three northern territories won't be able to meet national standards if Ottawa sticks to its guns on a funding formula for its new child care strategy.

The \$5-billion program was announced by Ottawa in its last budget. Under the plan, Ottawa is handing out cash based on population.

But Nunavut, along with the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, say there are higher costs in the North and they need more money.

In places like Iqaluit, space for day care is at a premium.

Jenna MacDonald, an early childhood educator, says her day-care staff would take in more kids if they had room. "There's a lot of kids that need the day-care centre, but there's not a lot of space to put them in," she said.

Five-year-old Ian Karetak is one of the lucky ones. But his father Vinnie says it took two years and many lost days at work before a day-care could take his son.

"We called each and every one every few months asking, 'Are we still on the list? Are we still on the list?' It came to a point where someone was saying, 'You know what, the list is so long we're not even going to take names anymore.' Hearing that, wasn't the best."

There's no lack of children in Nunavut. Last year, more babies were born in the territory than at any time since it was created six years ago.

The Nunavut government says the territory desperately needs extra money from the Early Learning and Child Care strategy to create more spaces, improve staff training and develop programs.

Ken Dryden, the federal minister of social development, says he doesn't agree. He says the extra cost of doing business in the North is already covered by the territories' transfer payments.

"For a territory like Nunavut, they would get about eight times as much in those transfers as the highest province would," said Dryden.

Nunavut Education Minister Ed Picco isn't pleased. He says Ottawa has recognized the specific needs of the North before and points to the health accord and the gas tax as examples.

"All we're saying is that for us to be able to deliver the same kinds of standards ... then we need a little bit more to do that," said Picco.

The request for extra funding is certain to come up when the three territorial leaders attend the first ministers meeting in Kelowna, B.C., in three weeks.

- reprinted from CBC News

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