

City seeks MPs' pressure in child care feud [CA-ON]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

London's board of control is leaning on the city's MPs for help in its battle with the province over child care funding. The board yesterday stood firm in its resolve not to pay 20 per cent of a federally funded expansion of child care demanded by the province.

And it is recommending city council write to MPs for help.

"For the province to arbitrarily change the rules, I think the federal government should look at that," said Controller Gord Hume.

"Of course, we need the child care spaces and the province is holding a shotgun to us. "

Last week, during a 2005 budget session, the board refused to add \$455,000 to the child care budget to access \$1.67 million from the province.

The board argues the child care funding is federal money and should flow to municipalities with no strings attached.

But the province demands municipalities pay 20 per cent, based on an 80-20 cost-sharing agreement struck in 2000.

"This is a bad situation the province is putting us in because the kids out there need this help and the parents need this help," Controller Bud Polhill said.

Deputy Mayor Tom Gosnell said the "easy" solution to the problem is for the province to change its policy and let the federal money flow directly to municipalities.

The board is also seeking assurances from the province that municipalities that don't participate in the child care funding will still be eligible to join later.

The issue gained momentum Tuesday when it landed on the floor of the Ontario legislature, with NDP Leader Howard Hampton demanding the province put a promised \$300 million into the program.

The province's response to London and Hampton is that provincial gas tax money to expand public transit will ease municipal budgets to pay for child care.

A spokesperson for Children and Youth Services Minister Marie Bountrogianni said the province is demanding municipalities pay 20 per cent because that's the funding split municipalities agreed to in 2000.

The province further argues the new federal money, totalling \$87 million this year and next, is only a portion of a \$570-million child care pot funded mostly by the province.

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