

Province announces 4,000 day-care spaces [CA-ON] ^[1]

\$58 million part of budget promise; group welcomes 'drop in bucket'

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EXCERPTS

At least 4,000 children from low-income families will get subsidized spaces in child-care centres under \$58 million in funding to be announced by the Ontario government today.

The money, from a federal-provincial agreement on child care and promised in May's provincial budget, will be passed on to Ontario municipalities for their child-care centres, a government source told the Star.

There is already funding for 173,000 subsidized child-care spaces across Ontario, with the 4,000 new spaces representing an increase of 2.3 per cent. But the spaces should help more than 4,000 children, because not all need full-day care.

Children and Youth Services Minister Marie Bountrogianni will make the announcement today at a Toronto day-care centre.

The money pleased a day-care advocacy group, which is hoping for more from Premier Dalton McGuinty's government after years of day-care funding cutbacks by the previous Progressive Conservative government.

"It's a welcome and much needed drop in the bucket," said Kira Heineck, executive director of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

"We hope it is a sign of much more to come."

Heineck noted that the funding is actually from the federal government, with the province funnelling it to municipalities.

She is hoping Bountrogianni will allow municipalities to spend the cash as needed on local child-care centres, warning that local municipal cutbacks threatened to bring the closing of thousands of subsidized day-care spaces this fall.

"This money should stop that crisis," said Heineck.

Heineck said the day-care community is waiting to see if the province will come forward with money from another federal-provincial agreement on early childhood development, which the previous government put mainly into children's health and development initiatives, including Ontario Early Years Centres instead of into day care.

The problem is that the Conservatives put "every penny" of Ontario's \$192 million share of the money into programs, so there is no money that can be switched quickly, another government source said.

Those programs, including the Early Years centres, are now under review.

- reprinted from the Toronto Star

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