

Government to overhaul BC child care services [CA-BC] ^[1]

Author: Rud, Jeff

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EXCERPTS

The provincial government is planning a significant restructuring that will soon see all child-care services -- and the allocation of more than \$220 million in funding -- placed under the umbrella of a single ministry.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development will soon become responsible for all government child-care programs, policies and decisions, most notably taking over administration of the \$184-million provincial child-care subsidy program from the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services.

Although the change has not been officially announced, a senior government source confirmed it is designed to achieve consistency and efficiency in the delivery of child-care services in B.C., which carries a total annual budget of \$220 million.

It will ensure that Children and Family Development, under the direction of minister Christy Clark, will take the lead on B.C. child-care issues. Licensing of youth group homes and child-care centres will remain under the Ministry of Health and child-care subsidy cheques will still be issued through the Ministry of Human Resources for the time being.

Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services Minister Murray Coell said the changes haven't been made yet. "I know the premier said that he would like to have child care under one ministry," Coell said.

Coell said there are benefits to putting these services under one ministry. "You would be able to deal with a broader range of child care if it was under one ministry and one policy group."

Child-care advocates say the pending amalgamation of services into a single ministry is a positive move, provided adequate funding and policies are put in place. They criticize the Liberal government for making child care more difficult for lower- and moderate-income families to obtain and for "federal funding earmarked for child care on other priorities in early-childhood development."

"The critical piece for child care is that it is under the umbrella of one ministry," said Sheila Davidson, who will take over as child and youth advocate for the City of Vancouver next month.

"But to build a good, high-quality child-care system requires political will, and to date we don't have that because this government has quite significantly underfunded, cut back and destabilized child care."

Coell said government is spending virtually the same amount on child care as the NDP did. "I think there is enough money," Coell said. "I think there is always a need to use that money in a better co-ordinated way. The federal government is also interested in child care and is bringing more money to the table nationally. So the co-ordination of that would be a positive thing."

- reprinted from Times Colonist (Victoria)

Region: British Columbia ^[2]

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