

Child care: Better vision, real investment vital [CA-NS] ^[1]

Opinion

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EXCERPTS

It is widely accepted by the United Nations, independent think tanks, numerous respected researchers and most industrialized countries that strong commitments to early childhood education and care build strong communities and societies. In a national study by the Canadian Child Care Federation in 2002, Canadians made it clear that they want a national, co-ordinated child-care plan with equal access for all children.

Recent events in Nova Scotia's child care sector -- the closure of three non-profit centres and the tenuous financial positions of the whole sector -- undermine the stated vision in the province's document, "Our Children: Today's Investment, Tomorrow's Promise."

Think of early childhood education as a house. For many years, the Tory government has invested in a lot of window dressing, while the foundation crumbles beneath them. This cannot continue.

The programs that have received funding through the federal Early Childhood Development Initiative and the Multilateral Agreement on Early Childhood Education are worthy and important. The fact remains that you can't deliver the programs effectively if day-care centres are closing because of inadequate operational funding.

It troubles me that Community Services Minister David Morse clearly does not understand what it means for a family to lose access to affordable, quality child care. His recent opinion article in The Chronicle Herald contains half-truths and misinformation, some of which I would like to clarify briefly.

The minister says when a day-care centre closes, the subsidies provided by the government to offset child-care expenses go to the family. What he doesn't say is the spaces become portable, and are funded at \$4 less per day than facility-based subsidized spaces. Families may also be on the hook for a larger surcharge to make up the difference between the \$14.95 maximum subsidy and the daily rate at the new facility.

For a single parent, even \$1 a day more in fees can make the difference between working and affording child care, and being forced to give up a tenuous toe-hold in the labour force and go back on social assistance. Affordable, quality child care is a cornerstone of helping families to achieve and maintain independence.

I would also like to clarify Mr. Morse's point about salary increases for staff. Not all staff got the salary increases, and child-care professionals in Nova Scotia remain among the lower paid in Canada.

This government lacks the commitment necessary to put the child-care vision in place. Nova Scotians do not need more misleading opinion pieces by the minister to make them feel warm and fuzzy about the government's child-care plan. Nor do they need freshly painted rooms in a house that has a crumbling foundation.

Day cares need stable operating funds and meaningful consultation in how federal initiatives are implemented in this province. Nova Scotians need affordable, accessible, quality child care, instead of wasted opportunity. Tomorrow is here and Nova Scotians are waiting.

Marilyn More is the NDP community services critic and MLA for Dartmouth South-Portland Valley.

- reprinted from the Chronicle-Herald

Region: Nova Scotia ^[2]

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