

Day-care talks to be behind closed doors [CA-QC] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Hearings on the future of Quebec's \$5-a-day day-care program begin tomorrow behind closed doors.

Selected groups will present their briefs to Family Minister Claude Béchar and Carole Théberge, Quebec's junior family minister, at closed sessions starting tomorrow in Quebec City and continuing Thursday and Friday in Montreal.

"There would have been too many groups," Mylène Champoux, spokesperson for Béchar, said yesterday when asked why the number of groups to be heard by the ministers was limited.

Reporters also will be barred from the hearings, but Champoux said Béchar would be available to the media after the hearings, comparing the closed sessions to the pre-budget consultations the finance minister holds with interest groups away from the media limelight.

Debates on major public issues are generally held in public in Quebec, with the media reporting exchanges between government ministers and those presenting briefs.

Those to appear in this round include labour federations and associations favourable to the existing \$5 day-care program, as well as school boards, business and social groups.

Champoux said the government will study the briefs of groups not heard in the hearings.

Yvonne Coupal, whose group wants the government to give the \$37.54 it now pays toward the \$42.54 cost of day care directly to parents, said in a telephone interview from Montreal that she wants to attend the hearings.

Champoux said Coupal would be admitted to the hearings because she has sent in a brief.

"Everything is on the table," Champoux said, when asked about Coupal's proposal. "It isn't set in concrete."

Béchar and Théberge tossed out three possibilities this month: a \$2 increase in the parental contribution to \$7, increasing the charge to \$10 for families with incomes above \$70,000 or increasing the charge to \$7.50.

Champoux said after the closed hearings, the Quebec cabinet would study the issue and the future course of day care in the province would be decided by mid-September.

-Reprinted from the Montreal Gazette.

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