

CUPE calls for reforms to day-care services; More money needed, union tells province [CA-ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Child-care services across Ontario are chronically underfunded, according to a study conducted by the Canadian Union of Public Employees.

The report released yesterday during a news conference at Queen's Park shows the government is spending \$471 million for regulated child care - some \$90 million less than was allocated when the Progressive Conservatives took over the government in 1995.

Toronto Councillor Olivia Chow said the child-care system in Ontario is on the brink of collapse because of chronic underfunding.

"It's rusty," she said. "It's really shaky."

Chow said the only reason the system hasn't completely collapsed in Toronto is because of innovative approaches taken by the municipality, including partnerships with parents and the private sector, as well as local fundraising.

She said it's evident from the CUPE study that Toronto is not alone and municipalities across the province do not have the money to provide accessible and high quality day care.

Since 1997, Chow said, Toronto has spent some \$27 million to cover costs that are no longer being looked after by the provincial government.

"They are walking away from their responsibility," she said.

Chow said the province is responsible for paying 80 per cent of the cost, but the money they are giving has been based on 1997-98 dollars.

"They have also stopped paying for any capital costs," she said.

She suggested the province should reimburse Toronto for the additional funding the city has been forced to put into child care and calculate the 80 per cent share based on actual costs.

The study analyzed child-care service plans submitted to the government from Toronto, Kingston, Niagara Region, Windsor, Thunder Bay, Peterborough, Ottawa Region, Stratford, Sudbury and Hamilton. It said the municipalities saw a need to lobby the province for more funding.

Children's Services Minister Brenda Elliott offered little immediate hope of a cash infusion, saying only that she would consider it.

"We are spending a great deal of money on child care - \$700 million is a lot of money," Elliott said yesterday.

Municipalities suggested the province should cover half of capital costs and all of any playground reconstruction required to comply with new government safety standards.

There is also a request for the government to consider developing emergency child-care facilities and to extend the hours of some daycare centres to address the needs of parents on shift work.

Chow said the federal government gave Ontario \$153 million this year and \$113 million last year for children's services, but the funds were not forwarded to municipalities.

Brian O'Keefe, secretary-treasurer of CUPE in Ontario, said the union is demanding a response from the government.

"We have a system that is falling apart right now," he said.

"The whole system is in crisis."

-Reprinted from The Toronto Star

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