

Quebec private day care issue heats up again. [CA-QC] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

History is about to repeat itself, parties on both sides of the private-versus-non-profit daycare debate warned yesterday.

The government has erred by letting the five-year moratorium on expansion of private daycare centres run out this month, while vowing it will not offer subsidies to let new ones play a role in the province's \$5-a-day network, both sides say.

But there the agreement ends, in what is at heart an ideological debate.

The Quebec Association of Private Daycare Centres told a public hearing examining new administrative measures for daycares that refusing any more subsidies to private centres will mean some parents pay \$25 to \$30 a day for child care.

"You're creating a two-tier system," said Sylvain Levesque, the group's president, told the social services committee.

Groups representing non-profit centres, the government's preferred model of daycare, said allowing the expansion of private facilities with no subsidies will only lead to parents demanding them later - exactly what happened when the \$5-a-day program was being created in 1996.

"Everyone agrees: history is going to repeat itself," said Helene Potvin, president of the Concertation Inter-Regionale des Centres de la Petite Enfance du Quebec.

Out of 147,000 \$5-a-day places currently available in Quebec, 25,000 are in private centres.

The government's goal is to have 200,000 places open by 2005-06. All those in non-profit centres have been planned for, though there are currently about 60,000 children on waiting lists.

Levesque said private providers could take in 3,400 of those children tomorrow if money allocated for yet-unopened non-profit centres were transformed into subsidies. They could welcome 20,000 within a year - much quicker than the government.

Liberal child and family services critic Russell Copeman said his party has long been in favour of ending the moratorium and bringing private providers into the \$5-a-day fold along with non-profit and at-home centres.

"Parents deserve a choice," he said.

Given that the subsidies the government pays to private centres are about 17-per-cent less than those destined for non-profit early childhood centres, Copeman said private centres can meet the demand faster, more efficiently - and offering the same quality.

"Dollar for dollar, they offer the same quality as an (early childhood centre)."

Child and Family Services Minister Linda Goupil, as well as the groups representing non-profit centres, argue that private daycares don't offer as high a quality of service because they are not governed by a board of parents and community members.

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