

Local child care providers blast B.C. government [CA-BC]^[1]

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Source: The Daily Bulletin

Format: Article

Publication Date: 20 Aug 2001

AVAILABILITY

Text below

Cranbrook child care officials are criticizing Victoria for cancelling a provincial subsidy program that provided licensed, out-of-school child care for a maximum of \$14-a-day.

The provincial government announced last week that the program which started in March 2001 will be cancelled at the end of the school year in 2002.

Under the program, subsidies were paid to licensed, day-home providers that provided out-of-school care to children from kindergarten to age 12.

More than 100 children were registered in the program in Cranbrook, said Kim Levie, program coordinator for the East Kootenay Child Care Resource and Referral.

"Now the parents of these children may be forced to look for unlicensed care or their children will become latch-key kids," she said.

Carol Hegg, who operates a licensed day home for school-aged children in Cranbrook, said she regretted the cancellation of the program.

"It took them years to get the B.C. Child Care Act up and going. And then when they finally do something for children they come along and cancel it and sacrifice the program.

"I think it's a shame."

East Kootenay MLA Bill Bennett said he sympathized with the complaints, but felt the government had no choice in the matter. "Our finance people tell us that the program is not sustainable," he said.

But Bennett said parents won't be left high and dry when the program comes to an end next year. "The way things are moving it wouldn't surprise me if we have something else in place within a year."

Bennett said he doesn't know at this point how the new program will compare with the program it's replacing. However, it's likely the new program will not be universal in scope and will be targeted at parents that truly need the subsidy, he said.

Announcing cancellation of the program a year in advance will help parents make the transition to the new program, Bennett said. But the government isn't making any apologies for the cancellation, he said.

"This was an NDP program and NDP legislation brought in just before the election and it's a piece of NDP legislation that we don't feel obligated to continue because it's not sustainable," he said.

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