

Day care lobby gets a hearing [CA-AB] ^[1]

Author: Edmonton Journal

Source: Edmonton Journal

Format: Article

Publication Date: 28 Feb 2001

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

An election campaign can be a great opportunity to petition the government.

Alberta's day-care workers have seized the opportunity in their fight for more government support and, happily, the premier appears to be listening.

Just a few months ago, Children's Services Minister Iris Evans was stoutly defending the government's decision to phase out subsidies to day-care centres in favour of direct subsidies to parents.

Now, following a few vocal protests, including one in Calgary in late January that attracted hundreds of supporters, the government is starting to show some flexibility.

Indeed, it now appears there will be a provincial committee studying the whole subsidy question, a committee conceived very recently. Those who organized the day-care protests can take full credit for this apparent change of heart.

The government has a role not just in helping the poor with day-care costs, but in ensuring high-quality day care for all children. Market forces alone seem unable to do it; there's a gap between what ordinary working parents can afford to pay for day care, and what the centres have to pay to attract and keep good staff. Government operating subsidies like those phased out by the Klein administration two years ago can help close that gap.

Day-care workers have been undervalued for years, because there seemed an unending supply of people willing to do the job for low pay. Now, however, day-care workers making the typical \$8 an hour are increasingly quitting to take better-paying jobs. The turnover rate is now a real concern; little children need consistency in their lives, not a constant rotation of caregivers.

Restoring operating subsidies would help centres retain staff by paying higher salaries. The ultimate beneficiaries, of course, will be the thousands of Alberta children who spend their early years in day-care centres.

-Reprinted from The Edmonton Journal

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