

Ontario falling behind in child care [CA-ON] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Our greatest resource for the future is our children, yet we are failing them because we continue to underestimate the importance of investing in early childhood education and in an accessible, affordable system of quality child care. At this time, the Canadian Federation of University Women of Hamilton has a serious concern regarding the current state of early childhood learning and child care in Hamilton and across the province.

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Currently, tens of thousands of children across the province are on child-care waiting lists. In Hamilton alone, 927 children are waiting for fee subsidies and it's as high as 15,000 in Toronto. With federal funding no longer available, 22,000 affordable child-care spaces could be lost along with the jobs of 4,000 child-care workers if the provincial government does not step in to make up the shortfall in funding.

When we look at child-care funding in other provinces, it is obvious that Ontario has fallen far behind Quebec and Manitoba. Over the years, both of these provinces have committed considerable amounts of funding for child care. In Quebec, child care costs \$7 per day and in Manitoba \$17 per day. Compare that with Ontario where parents pay on average \$40 to \$65 per day.

Today, 40 per cent of the annual cost of child care in the province of Quebec is covered by income and payroll taxes generated by increased employment, and the participation of women in the labour force is at historic levels. Its investment in child care has been a key factor in helping to bring about a 50 per cent drop in child poverty rates in 10 years.

It is also noteworthy that Quebec made it a priority to invest in a universal day-care system during the last economic recession. Meanwhile, financial provisions for a child-care program in Ontario's budgets continue to be much lower than those of its provincial neighbours. In 2003, McGuinty's government promised \$300 million for child care.

We are disappointed to learn that so far, only \$50 million of that promised money has materialized. We applaud the Ontario government's goal to reduce child poverty by 25 per cent in the next five years; that is a good first step. The next step is to provide the money for an affordable, accessible and quality system of child care in the upcoming budget.

The CFUW of Hamilton urges the Ontario government to support the recommendations of the "25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction" by:

- Fully funding and implementing full day learning for four and five year olds.
- Creating 7,500 new affordable child-care spaces in the non-profit sector.
- Saving 22,000 child-care spaces that are threatened by expired federal funds.
- Increasing the average wage of child-care staff.
- Investing \$200 million for operating funds and \$85 million for capital in 2009.

Providing the funding for this critical social infrastructure is an investment in our children and in our future: Let's do it! This article was written on behalf of the Canadian Federation of University Women -- Hamilton branch in collaboration with Norma Ducau, Linda Hall, Maureen Leyland and Pat Lyons.

- reprinted from the Hamilton Spectator

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