

Queen's Park commits funds to save 9,000 daycare spaces [CA-ON]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Queen's Park is stepping into the breach with \$18 million to save as many as 9,000 provincial child-care spaces threatened by the expiry of federal funding next year.

"We thought it was really important not to put kids and families in the middle of a jurisdictional squabble between two levels of government," said provincial Children's Minister Deb Matthews, who announced the bridge funding this morning as more than 60 child-care advocates met at Queen's Park for their annual lobby of MPPs.

"This is a very difficult time for parents and the last thing they need to worry about is whether or not their child will be in child care," she added.

It is a point Matthews said she will make this week when she meets federal Human Resources Minister Diane Finley to press for more social spending from Ottawa for both child care and poverty reduction.

With more than \$63 million in federal child-care funds set to run out next March 31 and no promise of new money in the recent provincial budget, Ontario child-care operators were reluctantly preparing to chop spaces starting next fall.

Advocates welcomed the move.

"It is a really good sign that the province has seen the urgency of the issue," said Andrea Calver of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, which organized today's Queen's Park lobby. "If the money forestalls cuts, that's an excellent sign. But there is still work to be done."

Municipalities, which administer child-care funding for Queen's Park, are also relieved because it means programs will be secure for another 18 months while the province considers the introduction of all-day learning for 4- and 5-year-olds in September 2010.

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The money in question is part of \$252 million in child-care funds Ontario received from Ottawa in 2006 before Prime Minister Stephen Harper ripped up the previous Liberal government's \$5 billion national child-care plan.

Instead of spending all the money that year, Ontario spread it out over four years to help support 22,000 new spaces. About 9,000 of those new spaces are directly dependent upon the federal cash and can't operate without it, municipalities say. The last \$63.5 million installment runs out next March and advocates had hoped the province would pick up the slack.

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario^[2]

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