

Allegations of favouritism in awarding daycare permits resurface in Quebec ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

More allegations of political favouritism involving the awarding of daycare permits to Liberal supporters resurfaced in the National Assembly Tuesday, renewing calls for a provincial auditor's inquiry.

The Parti Quebecois released documents showing that at least one group of Liberal supporters set up a lucrative chain of publicly funded daycare spaces.

Land and company-registry documents show that a company run by three brothers, Philip, Louis and Jack Cola, who once operated a slaughterhouse business in Quebec, purchased a daycare permit for 60 spaces after it had been awarded in 2008 to another Liberal supporter, Nourith Salonichios. The deal would bring to more than 1,000 the number of daycare spaces operated by the Cola brothers.

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Family Minister Tony Tomassi has repeatedly denied the charges, arguing that his government has never encouraged the emergence of chains of daycare centres but rather local community operations.

"We will take whatever measures that are needed if there are situations which don't seem to be right and did not abide by what the law intends," Mr. Tomassi said in the National Assembly.

According to documents obtained from the province's Chief Electoral Officer, the PQ said that the Cola brothers and their family contributed \$141,000 to the Liberal Party over the past ten years. Their chain of daycare centres operates more than 1,000 spaces, mainly in the Montreal area.

The Cola brothers owned only eight daycare centres until last February when they suddenly purchased five more before buying Mr. Salonichios's permit.

In February, the PQ unveiled what it said was a "racket" involving the resale of private daycare permits. They can sometimes be resold by an owner for an astronomical profit, the party argued.

According to Ezio Carosielli, owner of a chain of private daycare centres in Montreal, he was approached by permit owners to buy them for ridiculous prices.

"It could be that these people never had the intention to open a daycare centre," Mr. Carosielli said in an interview in March.

"On two or three occasions, I was offered ... these permits for anywhere between \$250,000 and \$500,000."

The owners of private daycares are guaranteed sure profits from the subsidies they receive from the government to operate the \$7-a-day

spaces.

The Cola family is eligible to receive up to \$10-million a year for their daycare centres. Mr. Carosielli said he receives \$8-million a year in government subsidies.

"It's an open bar for private daycare owners," Mr. Girard has reiterated on a number of occasions in the National Assembly.

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- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/10/04/allegations-favouritism-awarding-daycare-permits-resurface-quebec> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7855> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/legislation-and-regulation>