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No real 'choice' on child care [1]

Editorial
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The tragic death of 14-month-old Duy-An Nguyen, a cheerful little girl just starting to take her first steps, has thrust unregulated daycares into the spotlight.

But Education Minister Leona Dombrowsky, who oversees child care, has brushed aside concerns about safety. The province, she says, gives families the "choice to engage in regulated or non-regulated service."

Choice? What choice is there for parents on waiting lists for a government subsidy so they can afford regulated daycare? The waiting list in Toronto alone is nearly 18,000 children long.

What about families in neighbourhoods across the province where regulated spots are so hard to come by that they get on daycare lists before their child is born -- and still wait years? What's their choice?

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Governments from Ottawa on down have refused to accept responsibility. Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government killed a promising national child-care program, replacing it with $100-a-month cheques that don't produce new daycare spots or enable parents to afford existing ones. He, too, said he was giving parents "choice."

Queen's Park seems set on doing the bare minimum to keep existing daycare spots open rather than funding the expansion in the system that is so desperately needed. Cash-strapped cities can't afford to pick up the slack.

We don't know the quality of care offered in unregulated daycares for the simple reason that they are not monitored. What we do know is that they are available and often a lot cheaper, making them attractive to families with few other choices.

In this province, with a growing shortage of daycare spaces and subsidies, that is an ever increasing number of families.

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