

Five years after cancelling the national child care program: High cost, little choice for parents ^[1]

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Source: CUPE on Marketwire

Format: Press release

Publication Date: 4 Feb 2011

AVAILABILITY

Press release ^[2]

Text of the press release:

February 6 marks the 5th anniversary of Prime Minister Stephen Harper's cancellation of a national child care program and child care advocates and women's groups have a message for the government: Canada urgently needs a public system of early childhood education and care.

"Cancelling the national child care program has put a huge burden on low, modest and middle income families," said Sue Delaney of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada. "Mr. Harper claims he's delivered 'choice in child care' but the facts show that for most families, the options are severely limited. What families need is a quality system that's accessible and affordable for everyone."

In 2006 the Conservatives' first act in government was to terminate federal-provincial agreements that would have established a new \$1 billion a year national program. Instead the government is spending twice as much on its substitute Universal Child Care Benefit which pays \$100/month to parents for each child under age six. However fees for infant care in some Canadian cities can be higher than \$1,200 a month.

Laurel Rothman of Campaign 2000, a national group fighting child poverty explained: "The Harper government has spent \$11 billion in scarce public funds and has nothing to show. Most parents are still scrambling to find child care. Instead, we could have been building a real child care system that by now could have offered 500,000 more families a choice of quality services."

A decline in growth of regulated child care spaces has made finding good child care even harder. Many families are forced to rely on unregulated care and on the growing for-profit child care sector. In 2008 there were regulated child care spaces for just 20 per cent of 0-5 year olds, with rural communities and children with special needs even more poorly served. International child care studies rank Canada behind even the United States and Australia.

"Five years ago, Mr. Harper made a choice that has put many parents and especially women in a tough dilemma," said Paul Moist, national president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). "Parents who have to go to work don't have choices. They can't find a quality space and can't afford the high cost. It shouldn't be this way. A public option would give families the quality choices for their kids that all parents want."

Child care advocates note that five years later, Harper's choice doesn't address the actual cost of child care, doesn't build for the future, and makes finding quality affordable child care a serious challenge for Canadian families.

Signed by: Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada; Campaign 2000; Childcare Resource and Research Unit; Canadian Union of Public Employees; Ad-Hoc Coalition for Women's Equality and Human Rights; Canadian Federation of University Women

Region: Canada ^[3]

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