


Letter to members of the City of Toronto Executive Committee regarding proposed child care cuts ^[1]

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Attachment	Size
 Letter to Toronto Exec Committee.pdf ^[2]	81.92 KB

Text of the letter:

Dear Executive Committee Members:

Please accept this written submission in lieu of my verbal deputation before the Executive Committee today re: the Core Services Review.

As a social policy researcher who has studied early childhood education and childcare for more than 30 years, I am writing to let you know about my opposition to the proposed cut of 2,000 childcare subsidies. Specifically, I am commenting on two aspects of this issue: first, whether or not such a cut is an "efficiency", and second, whether or not a "cut" by attrition is a cut. I am suggesting that this cut would be wasteful, not an efficiency, and that a cut by attrition is still a cut.

On the first point: I believe that I am on very solid ground when I say that there are few cuts to City services that could be considered less efficient than a cut to the childcare subsidies that allow low income families to work or train for work.

A 2008 UNICEF research study identified three key elements relevant to this. First, low income families (such as those eligible for fee subsidies in Toronto) need to be employed if they are to 'pay the rent and feed the kids'. In Ontario (without a publicly funded childcare system), accessing a childcare subsidy is fundamental to their employment. Second, having more women in the workforce increases governments' income potential from taxes and reduced welfare costs, as Quebec research has found. As well, Canadian economist Robert Fairholm and US scholar Mildred Warner document a number of other significant financial stimulus benefits to local communities, proposing that these more than justify public spending on childcare. Finally, there is extremely strong evidence that good quality early childhood education and childcare is one of the most robust investments one can make in children's - particularly low income children's future academic success and employment prospects - something that 21st century cities need.

Just on these grounds alone, I would term the proposed cut to childcare subsidies uneconomical - even wasteful - rather than an "efficiency". I would also note that the KPMG report on which the proposed subsidy cut is based provides no plausible rationale for it, merely stating that the "opportunity" is based on an observation that "compared to other Ontario municipalities, the number of subsidized spaces in Toronto is close to the median".

A second point: I note that new language is being used to the effect that the City is "backing off" the childcare subsidy cuts. This was described by Councillor Minnan-Wong on Metro Morning today as "anyone who has a daycare space now will still be able to take their child to daycare". I would like to point out that cutting childcare spaces by attrition is still a cut; indeed, attrition is the method proposed by KPMG and the City Manager to make the childcare cuts. Further, at a time when more than 20,000 subsidy-eligible families are already on the City waiting list for a subsidy, a cut of 2,000 is a very substantial one.

In closing, I would like to note that in the recent poll reported in the Toronto Star, 76% of Torontonians opposed this cut to subsidized childcare. This poll is noteworthy as its large sample size allows a ward-by-ward analysis of the data.

In a commissioned report on childcare funding I recently wrote for the City of Toronto, I urged the senior levels of government to play their appropriate roles in making early childhood education and childcare viable, at the same time, recognizing that the City of Toronto's authority and influence in this area comes from its long résumé as a respected childcare leader, not a childcare reducer. Indeed, in my tenure as a parent, researcher and advocate in this field, there has not yet been a cut to the City's childcare subsidies - this would be a Toronto "first".

Yours truly,

Martha Friendly

Executive Director

Childcare Resource and Research Unit

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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