

# Parent pleas persuade Peel council to keep daycares open <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

A desperate mood turned celebratory Thursday after Peel parents spent five hours successfully convincing regional council not to close 12 childcare centres in Mississauga and Brampton.

A father whose child has cerebral palsy, a mother with a child who has Down syndrome, parents whose kids have other special needs or need evening care or have simply come to rely on the quality of care at the 12 centres - all pleaded with council in deputations that went on for hours.

Councillors listened. And responded by voting against a recommendation to close the daycares.

"I feel very great," Mohammed Babul said after the vote. The Mississauga resident has two children at the same daycare, one with cerebral palsy and one who needs speech therapy. Only a small percentage of kids at the centres have special needs.

"There's a further discussion now. I hope they make a wise decision," Babul said, referring to council's decision to have broad public consultations before further steps are taken.

"Maybe taking this step today is opening the eyes of the province," said Mississauga Councillor Pat Saito, who told the dozens of parents at the meeting that their message had been heard.

Parents, fully expecting the worst, erupted in applause, standing and cheering as one-by-one the councillors began to voice their support for regional childcare.

Saito suggested Queen's Park step in and help out with the growing list of families waiting for daycare subsidies across the region of Peel, as its population - already half of Toronto's - continues to swell.

The report said the \$12 million the region spends on the centres would be redirected to licensed non-profit and commercial daycares if the 12 centres were closed. That would allow about 580 more kids to receive a daycare subsidy, as 4,000 are currently on the waiting list.

"I was neutral," said Mississauga Councillor Ron Starr, addressing the parents. "You've given us the impetus to change direction."

But Mayor Hazel McCallion offered some sobering thoughts.

"Interesting, back in June ... there was very little concern voiced," McCallion said to her fellow regional councillors, referring to a closed council meeting last summer about the KPMG report that suggested getting out of the daycare business.

"I don't like window dressing. If we're going to maintain the service, we're going to have to raise taxes."

While most voiced concern about the lack of public consultation on the report and rushing to a vote, McCallion said she has other pressing concerns.

She told the parents they are getting an "elite, gold-plated" service at the regional centres that only 3 per cent of all kids in licensed centres in the region receive. She expressed concern that only 800 children will continue to get that service, and fewer than 400 will receive a subsidy, while 4,000 remain on the waiting list. She said it's also clear from delegates that many have had bad experiences at other daycares.

"I hope those on the waiting list get the services," said Babul. "I know it's kind of difficult. Nobody can make everybody happy."

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[2]</sup>

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