

Childcare conundrum worsening: Tabuns ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Toronto-Danforth MPP Peter Tabuns says as long as the threat posed to childcare centres doesn't go away, neither will he.

For months Tabuns has been raising the issue that Ontario's full-day kindergarten program will effectively put many daycares out of business. In late November he held what he called an emergency public forum to address what he termed a crisis in childcare.

In late January he held another public forum because, he says, the provincial government has shown no urgency in addressing the issue.

"The government has continued to not take any action to ensure that we don't lose childcare spaces and centres in the transition to full-day kindergarten," Tabuns said. "They've been getting pressed on this. They haven't been acting."

Ontario's full-day kindergarten has already been introduced in several schools and is planned to be implemented fully by 2014. While Tabuns said he is not opposed to the program he said it would remove four and five-year-olds from childcare centres across the province, essentially forcing centres to specialize in caring for younger children.

Provincial regulations stipulate the younger the age group, the lower the child to caregiver ratio must be, which makes caring for younger children more expensive.

"The money hasn't been set aside to support childcare centres to get through the transition period so that they continue to be there for children who are not yet going to full-day kindergarten," he said. "Money needs to be there to help childcare centres do renovations and help upgrade staffing levels to deal with the higher standards for younger children." "So there are transition issues here that have to be addressed and, as far as I can tell, the minister (of education) is not even following the issue."

Minister of Education Laurel Broten could not be reached for comment by press time.

Premier Dalton McGuinty has said the full-day kindergarten program will continue to be implemented despite recommendations in the Drummond Report that the program be cut in order to save money.

According to Tabuns, cancelling the program now would cause even more problems.

"For a whole bunch of parents who can't afford daycare and who have been desperately waiting for an expansion of all day kindergarten it would plunge their plans into chaos," he said. "We don't think the problem is introducing full-day kindergarten."

"The problem is doing it very badly. The problem is doing it without paying attention to the transition support needed for existing childcare centres."

Tabuns said if the issue is not addressed it will have a significant impact on the community.

"In some cases there will be people that will have to quit their jobs and go on welfare," he said. "In some cases people will look for informal care givers."

"You'll see more illegal and unregulated childcare operations springing up and we've already got a problem with that now. That problem will get a lot bigger."

-reprinted from the Town Crier

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