

Island employers prepare for childcare shifts ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Business on Prince Edward Island, both big and small, are bracing for a change in the way they schedule shifts after a recent federal ruling decided employers have to give working parents flexibility when it comes to childcare.

The decision handed down by Justice Leonard Mandamin on Tuesday explicitly states that requests for childcare accommodations stem from genuine need and are not simply the product of lifestyle choices.

"Before I had Charlotte I thought to myself, I love to work and I love my job. And now that I have Charlotte I find that it's definitely coming second," said parent Jessica Larter.

New mom Jenine Gosbee said the logistics of balancing work with day care is the hardest part of re-entering the workforce.

"My shifts are nine hours long and I have an hour travel to and from work. So I'm hoping to work 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., like an early morning and then get off in time to pick her up from daycare," she said.

Health PEI has 4,500 employees, many working shifts, but no policy when it comes to childcare.

"We certainly are going to look at the ruling and see what we can learn from it. As well we're going to look at our policies and practices to see what we should be doing," said Pam Trainor, executive director of corporate development and innovation with Health PEI.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business says smaller companies with fewer employees can't be as flexible and already do as much as they can.

"They're parents themselves, they work alongside their employees. So any accommodations that they can make they usually try to do, whether it's kids who are home sick or Christmas concerts," said spokeswoman Erin McGrath-Gaudet.

While the court ruling is a relief for some, it doesn't help fix the a shortage of daycare spots on P.E.I.

Rebekah Davis, a single mother of three, starts work in 10 days but is still on a daycare waiting list.

"That's stressful, really stressful," she said.

Since the ruling there have already been calls for more subsidized daycare spots.

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