

Quebec weighs moratorium on private daycare spaces ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

MONTREAL — Faced with the addition in January of 1,200 new spaces to an already underutilized network of private daycares, Family Minister Nicole Léger has suggested she might impose a moratorium on unsubsidized spaces.

Léger's press attaché, Bruno-Guy Cyr, said Tuesday that the minister was looking at a moratorium among "a number of scenarios." Cyr said the minister wants to resolve a situation where strong growth in private daycare has led to thousands of vacant daycare spaces and complaints from private operators that they can't make a living. No date has been set for an announcement.

The Parti Québécois government blames the previous Liberal government for setting up a system whereby private operators seeking a licence could not be turned down as long as they met governmental rules and norms for operating a daycare centre.

The result has been the creation of a private, unsubsidized network which, as of Dec. 31 last year, numbered 36,265 spaces, according to figures provided by the family department. Nearly 20,000 of those spaces were added since 2010. Demand does not seem to have kept pace with growth, given that as many as 10,000 of the private, unsubsidized spaces are currently vacant, according to private daycare organizations.

A number of private operators complain that the vacancies are the result of unfair competition from state-subsidized public \$7-a-day early childhood education centres. Private operators demonstrated in Montreal last week after Léger told the private network it was not eligible to bid on the majority of 15,000 new public spaces to be created by 2016.

Samir Alahmad, vice-president of the Association des garderies privées du Québec, said the government should not impose a moratorium on new private daycare spaces.

"The government already interferes too much with the private sector," Alahmad said. "It's true that the unsubsidized sector has seen a kind of chaotic development the last few years, but that was partially the fault of the government. It should have been straighter with daycare owners."

"A number of private daycare centres opened in the hopes that they could become part of the public network. But the only way to open a public daycare is to be accepted by a regional committee. The government should have told private centres it wasn't going to happen, they can't change status."

Alahmad said private centres need to "do their homework" before opening their doors. "People should be free to set up wherever they want, but they would be well advised to do a market study first."

-reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

Region: Quebec ^[2]

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