

# How Labour plans to exploit coalition divisions over childcare ratios <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

Despite Nick Clegg declaring last week that plans for new childcare ratios were "dead in the water", the government has still refused to confirm that this is the case, merely stating that it will make its position clear "shortly".

The reason for the confusion is that the Tories weren't expecting Clegg's intervention. While resigned to losing the reforms, they hoped to make a managed retreat. But the Deputy PM ended any hope of that when he said: "There is no real evidence that increasing ratios will reduce the cost of childcare for families. The argument that this will help families with their weekly childcare bill simply does not stack up. I cannot ask parents to accept such a controversial change with no real guarantee it will save them money - in fact it could cost them more."

Eyeing a political opportunity, Labour has announced that it will table a Commons vote today enshrining the current ratios in law. As in the case of the recent motion on a mansion tax, the aim is to highlight the coalition's frayed unity, while challenging Clegg to put his vote where his mouth is.

The Commons will debate the remaining stages of the Children and Families Bill today and Labour has tabled New Clauses 6 and 7, which would protect the current ratios by transferring them from statutory guidance to primary legislation. Children's minister Liz Truss has proposed changing the ratios from 1:3 to 1:4 for children under one and one-year-olds and from 1:4 to 1:6 for two-year-olds.

Shadow children and families minister Sharon Hodgson said: "Ministers have no credible plan to solve Cameron's childcare crisis. The one plan they did have would have put quality and safety at risk, and there was no evidence it would have made childcare cheaper.

"We want to ensure that David Cameron and Michael Gove are prevented from making these potentially damaging changes, which they haven't ruled out in spite of last week's announcement from the Deputy Prime Minister.

"If Nick Clegg is serious about blocking Liz Truss's reforms, he should lead his MPs in joining Labour in voting for measures to protect child safety. We need action not warm words."

While there's little chance of Clegg rising to Labour's bait, this is another example of how the party is fighting smart as the coalition begins to unravel.

-reprinted from the New Statesman

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

**Tags:** legislation and regulation <sup>[3]</sup>

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