

# Response: City re-examining daycare program <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

The following letter, written by CUPE National President Paul Moist is a response to an article in the Ottawa Sun entitled "City re-examining daycare program" published June 23 [see text of article below]. The article asks the question: "Should the city even be in the daycare business at all?"

Municipal child care centres have long been recognized as delivering high quality care. They provide leadership and innovation, and often support hard-to-serve and higher needs populations.

The research shows they are also likely to be the top quality services, as well as providing essential services and supports to vulnerable families. Just a few weeks ago the City announced a new pilot program to be rolled out in all its centres for healthy eating and physical activity.

Child care can't operate as a market. Using a market model has meant a low rate of expansion, lack of choices for parents, sky-high parent fees, and dubious quality.

We need all levels of government engaged in child care so we can grow services for all families searching for child care. The municipal government has a special role in planning and managing the local system along with providing the model for high quality care.

Yours truly,

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Excerpts from original article "City re-examining daycare program" published June 23 and written by Michael Aubry:

Should the city even be in the daycare business at all?

With councillors tripping over themselves to distance the city from the ailing taxpayer-funded Pine View Municipal Golf Club, it's a good time to examine the role they play in child care too.

The City of Ottawa runs 13 daycares, mostly in low-income neighbourhoods because staff argue no private centres would ever open up shop in those communities.

That makes up only about 5% of all daycare spots.

The city helps families with lower incomes pay for child care by offering subsidies for children, which can pay for as much as 100% of a child's fees.

Some neighbourhoods, like Accora Village and Michele Heights, have a much higher number of subsidized children than others.

That's what drove the city to open up their own daycares.

But some say the city has no place managing daycares - and paying early childhood educators more to work there - in the first place.

While early childhood educators at most centres are on a fixed payscale, city daycare workers are paid more, and their salaries rise with seniority just like any city worker.

Karen Nesrallah, with the Ottawa Child Care Association, says while city daycares do serve a role in the community, staff should be looking for ways to slowly pull out of the industry.

She argues it would be more cost-efficient to offer benefits for private, not-for-profit daycares to open in those neighbourhoods instead.

"Let a not-for-profit go in there, open it up for them, and give them their subsidies," she argues.

But Coun. Mark Taylor insists the solution isn't that simple.

"I think there's always going to be a place for the city to have municipal daycare, unless we get to a world where there are agencies willing to move into neighbourhoods where essentially every child coming in is going to be subsidized," explains Taylor.

He said there's simply few incentives for private daycares to take the risk.

Nesrallah, on the other hand, says daycares are up for the challenge.

"We're not a tough community to deal with," she said. "We work with families, we think like families."

Kim Hircott, executive director of Andrew Fleck Child Care Services, agrees the city should be looking ways to take on more of a planning role instead of managing daycares.

"The city could play a role in motivating and supporting more non-profit operators to relocate or to move to communities where there is a higher demand," she said.

Yet with the city offering some of the lowest rates in town, Taylor said pulling out of child care isn't part of their plan for the near future.

-reprinted from the Ottawa Sun

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

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