

# More regulated daycare spaces needed, Toronto councillor says

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**Source:** Toronto Star

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 26 Oct 2013

## EXCERPTS:

The proliferation of unregulated home daycares on an east Toronto street is a symptom of "the huge unmet demand for child care," in the city, says the area's local councillor.

"All of the (licensed) centres have long waiting lists. There just isn't enough child care. And what there is, is quite expensive," said Councillor Janet Davis (Ward 31 Beaches-East York).

"These are issues the government has to tackle. We have not had an expansion in child care in many, many years to meet the needs," she added.

As the Star reported Friday, four unregulated home daycares have opened in a stretch of six east Toronto homes in the past few years. Three of the homes are owned by members of the same family, although the owners say they operate independently.

One of the homes has been in violation of the provincial Day Nurseries Act three times since June for having more than five children on the premises. But the operator says the infractions occurred under exceptional circumstances. She was not fined and continues to run her business.

Although parents say the daycares offer excellent care, some neighbours complain the concentration of child-care businesses has changed the nature of their street, especially since some of the operators don't appear to live in the homes. The Star has not verified if that is the case.

Davis said city zoning bylaws may need to be strengthened to ensure people running home daycares actually live there.

"I think we need to take into consideration whether it's appropriate to have a concentration of businesses operating on a residential street, especially if the operators aren't living in there," she said. "I don't think it's appropriate if these homes are only being used during the day and are empty at night and on weekends."

Good child care can be offered in both regulated and unregulated home daycares, Davis said. But research shows that quality is likely to be better in regulated settings, she said.

Earlier this month, council passed her motion to increase the number of daycare subsidies for infants, toddlers and preschoolers in licensed care by 528, "subject to the 2014 budget review process." If approved it would boost the number of subsidies to 24,792.

But at a time when about 19,000 children are on the city's subsidy waiting list, Davis said the city must do more.

Instead of spending \$40 million a year to finance a subway in Scarborough that the city doesn't need, Toronto could fund almost 3,500 new daycare subsidies, Davis said.

Or the city could use the money to build 186 new daycare centres and create 18,600 more full-fee spaces, she said.

The current 57,000 licensed spaces in daycare centres and regulated homes in Toronto are enough to serve just 21 per cent of children under age 10 at a time when more than three-quarters of their mothers work, she noted.

"We need growth in child care to meet the demand of young families," Davis said. "Child care is crucial to our local workforce development, economic growth, women's equality and child development."

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

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