

Child-care advocate wants spotlight on unlicensed daycares ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

A Manitoba child-care advocate group says it's time more light is shone on the issue of unlicensed home daycares.

The Manitoba Child Care Association praised the introduction of legislation in Ontario on Tuesday that would tighten rules governing unregulated daycares and impose severe fines on those who defy the law.

The Ontario Child Care Modernization Act would give the province the power to close a daycare immediately if children are at risk. It would also remove financial incentives for remaining unlicensed, the Toronto Star reported.

Pat Wege, executive director of the Manitoba Child Care Association, said her organization has pressed the provincial government to lead a discussion about unlicensed in-home child care.

Highly publicized incidents in Ontario and Alberta have brought the issue to the fore, Wege said. In the Toronto area alone, three children in unlicensed home daycares have died since July.

"If you're concerned with the health, safety and well-being of children it's time to take another look at this," she said in an interview Tuesday.

Manitoba already has a law in place that limits the number of children in a home daycare to four, including the provider's kids, but Wege it's not unheard of for there to be "large numbers of children" in such homes.

A chronic shortage of licensed daycare spaces is at the root of the issue. Manitoba has 28,580 spaces in child-care centres plus another 3,054 spaces in licensed home-based daycares. But with more than 188,000 children aged 12 and younger in the province, it means tens of thousands of children are looked after in unregulated in-home daycare and after-school care, Wege said.

Meanwhile, there are more than 11,000 children on waiting lists for licensed daycare spots in the province.

A spokeswoman for Family Services Minister Kerri Irvin-Ross said Manitoba will watch closely as Ontario rolls out its new legislation to see if there are lessons that can apply here.

In September, the province announced it would be holding public consultations this winter in preparation of a new five-year child-care plan to be announced this spring.

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