

Fighting for daycare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Breanna Atkinson says if the city shuts down its daycare facilities, she might have to stop working or drastically reduce her hours.

The mother-of-two on Monday began a push to convince city councillors and administration to put aside thoughts of getting out of the daycare game, starting an online petition at Change.org she hopes to present before a decision is made.

Atkinson also started a Facebook page, For Our Children, late last week.

"I started it just to inform parents and other people in the city of what city council is talking about doing to our city-run daycare programs, and that is to cut them, essentially. That's not what we need. We need a change, not a cut."

Atkinson said she fears closing the facilities would mean she and other parents could be faced with lengthy waiting lists for spots in private facilities.

According to a report presented to council last month during budget deliberations, city daycare facilities are expected to lose about \$3,250 per day, about \$500 more than they lost per day in 2013. That amounts to about \$774,000 over the course of a year.

Atkinson, whose children are both younger than four, said she passed up several opportunities to put her children in private daycare centres because of the convenience of the Algoma Child Care Centre, which is just down the street from where she works as a nurse at St. Joseph's Hospital.

The city facility also offers extended hours, early drop-off and late pick-up options, something she needs as a shift worker.

It's a quality of life issue, she added.

"I would have no expendable money to take my kids to do things," Atkinson said, worried about having to return to part-time work.

Danielle Legacy was one of the first people to sign Atkinson's petition, which at last count had 14 signatures.

"My children attend this daycare and I need this service," she said.

Mayor Keith Hobbs has openly said he doesn't think the city should be in the day-care business, but added now isn't the time to get out, with 278 families utilizing the service.

"What's going to happen to those families?" Hobbs was quoted as saying at the time.

Not all councillors agreed.

At-large Coun. Rebecca Johnson was adamant municipal taxpayers shouldn't have to cover the shortfall, and asked that Thunder Bay follow the lead of other Ontario cities in pulling out of the day-care industry.

"If Kenora can do it, so can Thunder Bay," she said last month.

Earlier this month council did vote against extending a child-care pilot program at Grace Remus, which is slated to close by June, according to the city budget. Only 15 children attended the program, which was slated to cost the city more than \$90,000 before it was axed.

Atkinson said she plans to voice her concern at council when the issue is brought up later this spring and hopes enough people sign her online petition to force council to listen. She also plans to bring hard copies of her petition to local daycares for concerned parents to sign.

She suggested city daycares could consider taking in younger children to help make up the financial shortfall. At present children must be at least 18 months old to qualify.

-reprinted from TB News Watch

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: privatization ^[3]

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/03/fighting-daycare> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/privatization> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/8166>