

Parents need child care to work, party leaders told ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Ontario's political leaders on the campaign trail this week were promising jobs, but parents can't work without child care, says Toronto mother Brooke Richardson.

"I am a working mom of a six-month old and I really need political leaders to tell me that I'm going to be able to get an affordable, licensed child-care space," she told a news conference on the lawn at Queen's Park Friday.

The 29-year-old mother of three young children who is working part-time while enrolled in PhD studies, has been waiting for a child-care space and fee subsidy since before her son was born.

"But getting either of them is like winning a lottery," she said, as she held baby Kai

"To get my vote, political leaders need to get serious about creating a well-funded, stable child-care system."

Tens of thousands of families are on waiting lists for licensed child-care spaces and subsidies across the province, advocates said. In Toronto, where the average cost of a licensed spot runs from \$40 to \$70 a day, more than 16,000 children are waiting for subsidies.

In the meantime, centres like Progress Place in Scarborough, which has 18 vacant spaces, are struggling to stay open because parents can't afford the fees and can't get subsidies. Supervisor Maria Wisniowska said she doesn't know what the centre will do when it loses 36 children to full-day kindergarten in the fall because it can't get funding to add more infant and toddler spaces.

"Parents and children need licensed care, but the financial squeeze means we may close," said Wisniowska, who brought 15 pre-schoolers from her centre to the news conference.

Parents, daycare workers and early childhood educators want party leaders to commit to raising wages of chronically low-paid child-care staff and to make an emergency investment of \$300 million to prevent more daycares from closing, said Andrea Calver of the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care.

"Every parent will tell you we need more child care and we need it to be more affordable," she said. "To make it happen, we need the government to sit down and come up with a well-funded plan."

Advocates also called on the leaders to commit to reintroduce Liberal legislation, which would tighten requirements for unlicensed child care, that died with the election call.

Campaigning in Kingston, Liberal Leader Kathleen Wynne noted her government's spring budget would have increased the wages of early childhood educators by \$2 an hour.

"We have put forward a child-care modernization plan. It's in the process right now and if we are re-elected we will re-introduce that plan," she said.

Wynne said she was aware of the rally at Queen's Park and the concerns of child-care advocates.

"We have been open to and will continue to work with them as the legislation goes through committee. We want to get it right. We want to make sure that the legislation, the regulations, are in place, which have not been updated for some time," she said.

"We will continue to expand the childcare options for people in the province."

In Barrie, Tory Leader Tim Hudak says he won't announce any new spending and that includes no more money for child care.

"I am not the leader who is going to promise more and more spending," he said.

NDP Leader Andrea Horwath, who said she will have more to say about child care later in the campaign, noted the party pushed for the extra \$250 million for child care that became part of the minority Liberal government's 2012 budget.

"New Democrats have been the ones that have been trying to make sure that parents are able to access quality, safe care for their children," she said Friday at a Windsor auto parts plant.

- reprinted from Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

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