

Budget indexes cost of daycare to rate of growth in cost of program ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

After hinting he might make wealthier parents pay more for subsidized daycare spots than those with more modest incomes, Premier Philippe Couillard's first budget instead ties daycare fees to the rate of growth in the cost of the program.

This will mean parents whose children are in public daycare will pay \$7.30 a day next fall, instead of the current \$7 a day.

This is a modest increase compared with the former Parti Québécois government's proposed increase of the daily fee to \$8 next fall and \$9 in 2015, which Couillard had promised to scrap.

But some observers worry the Liberals are still planning future increases.

"The real budget will be the next one and it is obvious that the Liberal government is preparing the ground for an increase in daycare fees, perhaps by tying them to parental income," said Simon Tremblay-Pepin, a researcher with the Institut de recherche et d'informations socio-économiques, an independent Montreal-based think-tank.

He noted that the PQ's proposed \$2-a-day fee increase would only have brought in \$125 million to government coffers per year.

"When you have a deficit of several billion dollars, an increase like that to daycare fees certainly won't go very far toward solving the problem, but it would hurt a lot of families," he said.

Tremblay-Pepin noted that basing fees on income would require a more costly bureaucracy for the daycare system, and would be less efficient than using the existing income tax system to have wealthier Quebecers pay more to support universal programs offered at low or no cost to everyone, like daycare.

The budget also confirmed the Liberals will expand the program to 250,000 available spots from the current 220,000 by 2022, by creating 6,300 new spots this year and 4,000 every year thereafter until the goal is reached.

Members of the Parti Québécois pointed out that the Liberal government is increasing the number of daycare spaces by only half as much as the PQ had promised for next year.

"As we had feared, families, regions and the most vulnerable will pay the price for Liberal austerity. Nothing about this was mentioned during the election campaign," said Éline Zakaïb, the PQ member of the national assembly for Richelieu and the party's treasury board critic.

-reprinted from the Montreal Gazette

Region: Quebec ^[2]

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