

Parliamentary daycare may hold solution for MP parents ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A Conservative MP says politicians should examine whether an existing daycare on Parliament Hill could be used to accommodate the childcare needs of young MPs rather than creating a new one.

Gord Brown (Leeds-Grenville) says the Children on the Hill daycare could be a good option to help MPs cope with the parliamentary baby boom.

Earlier this month, NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair wrote Commons Speaker Andrew Scheer asking that the idea of a parliamentary daycare be considered in light of Parliament's changing demographics.

"More and more young women and men are being elected to serve constituencies across the country. In my own NDP caucus, we have many parents with young children and more on the way," he wrote in his July 8 letter.

"We have a responsibility to support these members, and all Canadians, by creating the infrastructure necessary to ensure this trend continues," Mulcair said.

His suggestion was a "reasonably costed pay-for-service, drop-in childcare" that would be available while the Commons was sitting as well as when parliamentary committees meet.

But Brown said solution may lie with the Children on the Hill daycare, located in the Confederation Building, where many MPs have their offices, and just a short walk from Centre Block.

"Maybe the answer is expanding somewhat to serve members with the existing daycare. That's probably the answer without creating a whole other thing," Brown said in an interview.

"I don't think they need to open up a whole other daycare."

The demographics of the Commons have been changing over time, a change driven home in the 2011 election that saw a number of younger MPs elected. Now, several of them are having children.

Many of them are New Democrats but it cuts across party lines with Industry Minister James Moore, Justice Minister Peter MacKay and Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau all having young children.

While many young families can face challenges in arranging care for their children, MPs face an extra challenge since they divide their time between Ottawa and their constituency. Their spouse, because of their own work commitments, may not be able to join them in Ottawa.

"Every Member of Parliament has a unique situation," Brown said.

However, he estimates that fewer than a dozen MPs would actually need the services of a daycare, a small number that makes it hard to justify an entirely new facility.

"I can't see creating a whole new daycare operation," he said.

Brown's son, Tristan, goes to Children on the Hill and the MP is full of praise for the daycare. But he concedes it does present challenges for MPs looking for childcare. When Brown went looking for a spot for his son, who was born in 2012, it had a waiting list. And it didn't take children younger than 18 months old.

A person at the daycare said earlier this week they wouldn't be able to comment on the issue.

In 2012, NDP MP Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre) paid tribute to Children on the Hill as it marked its 30th anniversary. He quipped it was the only place on Parliament Hill where "manners, politeness and respect for colleagues remains the norm."

"Let us take a lesson from them," he told MPs in the Commons.

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