

Chow pledges \$15 million for 3,000 new child-care spots ^[1]

Author: Monsebraaten, Laurie

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EXCERPTS:

Olivia Chow would invest \$15 million over four years to create 3,000 desperately needed new child-care spaces if she is elected Toronto mayor.

And half of the new spots would be subsidized to help parents pay fees that can run as high as \$20,000 a year.

Chow made the announcement - the third plank in her election plan to "put children and families at the heart of our city" - at a downtown daycare centre Tuesday morning.

"I am the only candidate talking about investing in after-school programs, school nutrition, and now affordable, accessible child care," Chow said.

"Families need more support, and with me as their new mayor, I will provide that support."

John Tory and Doug Ford have not mentioned children's services in their campaigns. Ford had no comment Tuesday. However, Tory seemed open to Chow's child-care proposals.

"I think that families have a need . . . and I'm quite willing to take a look at what (she) she put forward today," Tory said after an afternoon debate.

"But we've got to focus on the question of how we're going to pay for this, and I think we must not let the other two levels of government abdicate what are important responsibilities that they have in the area of child care . . . transit and affordable housing and infrastructure."

At a time when thousands of Toronto families need daycare, there is only enough licensed spaces for about one in five children. Soaring costs mean that more than 20,000 kids are waiting for fee subsidies.

Chow said she would use \$15 million in city capital funds to renovate and build new facilities to address the severe shortage of licensed care, especially for babies and toddlers. Her proposed 1,500 new subsidies, which includes 668 the city is already planning to add this year, would be funded through the extra \$20 million Toronto is getting from the province's new child-care funding formula , Chow added.

In addition to the new spaces and subsidies, Chow said she would work with school boards to better integrate before- and after-school care for students in kindergarten through Grade 3.

For children from Grades 4 to 6, Chow said she would provide more flexible - and less costly - care by expanding the city's after-school recreation and arts program, which she helped start more than a decade ago when she was a councillor.

Chow would help the city save money by introducing bulk buying for child-care centres. And she would create a new central waiting list to reduce the stress on parents who now have to put their names on multiple daycare lists in the hope of securing a spot.

As a former city councillor and school trustee with a long track record on the issue, Chow said she is the only mayoral candidate with the experience to work with the province and school boards to make Toronto's child-care system more child-friendly and easier for parents.

"I am creating more services for children, making sure existing services are more integrated, flexible and more effective," she said.

Councillor Janet Davis, who joined Chow at the announcement, said it is "irresponsible" for any mayoral candidate to not have a child-care policy.

"It is the number one priority issue I hear from parents at the door," said Davis (Ward 31, Beaches-East York).

"Child care is a fundamental, necessary condition for women to achieve equal participation in our society and for families to work," she said. "It is also an economic development issue."

Parent Kristin Cavoukian, 38, welcomed Chow's child-care plan.

The part-time university teaching assistant and PhD candidate says she was lucky to get a subsidized spot for her 18-month-old daughter

at the University of Toronto's Campus Community Co-op Day Care .

"It was such a scramble," said Cavoukian, who put her name on numerous daycare waiting lists when she was two months pregnant.

"When you are pregnant, you have so many things to worry about without having to wrangle your way through all of the various child-care waiting lists," she said. "Parents need more child care. Children need more child care. I can't believe (Chow) is the only candidate talking about this."

Region: Ontario ^[4]

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