

Group urges government to 'close the tap' on unused daycare spots ^[1]

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Source: Montreal Gazette

Format: Article

Publication Date: 30 Sep 2014

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS:

The head of a group representing daycare administrations is urging the Quebec government to "close the tap" on the estimated \$15 million in subsidies given to daycares for vacant spots.

About one in 10 daycares bill the government for unused places, Francine Lessard, the director of the Conseil québécois des services de garde éducatifs à l'enfance, told reporters Tuesday.

For example, a young couple that is supposed to return to work in February may be asked to pay months in advance simply to reserve their child's spot in a daycare, she said. "For all that time, the parents are paying \$36.50 per week for a service they don't use, and the state is subsidizing that child for months for a place that isn't actually used.

"We have to use all our spots in Quebec, we don't have the means (not to)."

If Quebec cracked down on the abuse of subsidies, it could free up 8,000 daycare spots, she added.

The family ministry, since at least 2011, has 14 inspectors working to weed out fraud in its subsidized daycares. "We have to see what we can be doing better, not just at one place but the whole system, because if it happens at one place it could happen anywhere," Family Minister Francine Charbonneau said. "Every time someone suspects something they have to lift a hand because we have people working on that every day."

Charbonneau couldn't say how many daycares abuse subsidies. "I wouldn't say it's happening on a large scale," she said. "However, we have to make sure it doesn't happen."

Parents are often nervous to speak out against abuses of daycare subsidies because they worry their child will lose their place, Lessard pointed out. "If they ask me to pay for five days although I only need three, if I refuse will I still have my place? The question remains," she said.

It isn't the first time the CQSGEE is asking Quebec to hire more inspectors to sniff out malpractice. Lessard said she first approached the government on this subject in 2009.

"It's been years that this exists, it's been years that we've been talking to the government, telling them 'You have to let us act, to let us investigate,'" she said.

"We know there's a will, but we want it to be stronger. We're asking them to act."

Daycare co-ordinators are worried about publicly calling out the problem because they fear reprisal, Lessard noted.

At a news conference held in the National Assembly press office, a co-ordinator spoke to the media on condition of anonymity. "I can say that, where I'm from, it's true that some people in charge (abuse subsidies), but not all of them," she said with her back turned to the cameras. In her experience, the most common problem is that a CPE will ask parents to sign for five days of service when they only need three.

"I think it's important to look at this situation especially in this context of reviewing public finances," she said. "I would say by respect for the people of my territory that most do excellent work."

Region: Quebec ^[3]

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/10/group-urges-government-%E2%80%98close-tap%E2%80%99-unused-daycare-spots> [2]

<http://www.montrealgazette.com/news/Group+urges+government+close+unused+daycare+spots/10249090/story.html> [3]

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