

Protect our children with licensed daycare spaces^[1]

Editorial

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EXCERPTS

"What could be more pressing, more urgent, than protecting children?"

That's the question Ontario Ombudsman André Marin asked with the release last week of his highly anticipated report *Careless About Child Care*, which investigates unlicensed daycare in the province.

The answer to his question seems obvious: nothing.

But the report indicates that the safety of 823,000 children cared for in unregulated settings across the province - more than double the number in licensed daycare - was anything but top of mind for staff assigned to protect these children.

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The unfortunate reality is that parents have no choice but to turn to unregulated settings because of a shortage of licensed daycare places in the province. That makes Marin's descriptions of lax protections in unregulated daycares especially troubling, and his exhaustive 113 recommendations to improve these spaces all the more urgent.

The good news, he says: "The bulk of them (95) are already being addressed by the ministry and long overdue new legislation is finally on its way through the legislature."

Importantly, the ministry has established an enforcement unit with a 1-800 number to investigate complaints about unlicensed daycares. That unit will also record past complaints, which will be publicly available so that parents can easily assess the reputation and past actions of the caregivers with whom they are leaving their children.

That's key because Marin's investigation was spurred by the death of 2-year-old Eva Ravikovich last year in a "brazenly illegal" unlicensed home daycare in Vaughan, where there were 29 children in care - far more than the five permitted in unregulated settings.

Four complaints had been made against the daycare with the Ministry of Education in the year before Eva's death, but no one followed up. Indeed, out of 448 complaints across the province about overcrowding between January, 2012, and July, 2013, when Eva died, officials failed to do site visits in 25 cases, Marin noted.

The new legislation will also strengthen the cap on five children under the age of 10 in unlicensed daycare by excluding the current exemption for the child care operator's own children in that total number.

There's no question that Marin's report, and the government's action on it, should lead to safer unregulated daycare in the province. And that is welcome news.

The bigger question, though, is what it will take for all levels of government to work together to create a universal child care program that would permit parents to find safer licensed daycare spots? As Marin asked: What could be more urgent than protecting children?

Read online at the [Toronto Star](#)^[2]

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