

# Daycare reform bill still leaves kids behind <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Most days of the week, Kate Millie's south-central Hamilton home is filled with babies.

Millie, who has a Master's degree in education and is a Montessori teacher by trade, runs a home daycare for three children: her 10-month-old daughter, Zada, and two other baby girls, aged 12 and 14 months.

Millie takes her young charges for walks or to the park every day, feeds them lunch and snacks, and applies the Montessori philosophy to her caregiving.

But under new legislation making its way through the provincial government, what Millie is doing would be considered illegal. Bill 10, also called the Childcare Modernization Act, limits caregivers to two children under two years old.

"I'm of two minds. I understand two under two, because this is a lot of work. If I had two-under two and a three year old, where the needs are so vastly different, it would be hard," said Millie. "It works for us because they're all doing similar things...I chose to do this because my friends didn't know where to put their child and didn't feel comfortable with the options available."

Bill 10 is the province's answer to the outdated legislation that governs daycare in Ontario. It tightens the rules for unlicensed home daycares and gives the province sharper teeth to penalize providers whose facilities are unsafe. (The Day Nurseries Act, which contains the province's childcare laws, was originally created in 1946 and hasn't been updated since 1983.)

However, Bill 10 has also been controversial, especially the limits on the number of children in an unlicensed home daycare setting. Currently, home daycares are allowed to care for five children, plus their own. The bill would limit the total number to five, with only two of those children under two. Licensed home daycares are already held to these standards.

Home daycare providers are warning the changes will make it impossible for them to earn a worthwhile paycheck, which in turn will lead to higher fees and fewer spots.

"Many are closing their doors already and there will inevitably be a number that go underground," said Nikita Mahood, Hamilton representative for the Coalition of Independent Childcare providers. "Parents are going to accept substandard care because it's affordable."

Other daycare reform advocates say there should be even stricter limits. Marni Flaherty, CEO of Today's Family Early Learning and Childcare, says that for safety reasons, the province should limit unlicensed home daycares to two children under two and three children under three.

"We believe the age restriction makes good sense for kids," Flaherty said.

What everyone seems to agree on is that the bill goes nowhere near far enough to address the serious gaps in the province's daycare system.

The bill falls short of taming the Wild West-like environment of the unlicensed and unregulated home daycare industry. There are no requirements for first aid training, police checks or safe food handling practices.

Bill 10 comes alongside a damning report on the state of daycare from Ontario Ombudsman André Marin, prompted by the deaths of four young children over seven months. In his report, Marin outlined "systematic government ineptitude" when it comes to oversight of unlicensed home daycares.

However, those homes fill a need for parents, especially those whose children are under the age of 18 months. There's a massive shortage of licensed daycare spots available in Hamilton - there are 11,899 licensed spots for children from 18 months to 12 years old, but only 251 licensed spots for infants up to 18 months. As a result, many parents have no other option but to use unlicensed home daycares.

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Read online at the [Hamilton Spectator](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

**Region:** Ontario <sup>[3]</sup>

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