

# Single parents' federation slams Couillard daycare reform <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Life is rarely easy for a single mother or father trying to raise a child, but it will become even tougher if the Couillard government follows through with its reform of public daycares, according to a group representing single-parent and blended families.

The Fédération des associations de familles monoparentales et recomposées du Québec warned Family Minister Francine Charbonneau on Monday against scrapping the universal \$7 daily fee in daycares with one based on family income.

The bill would maintain the \$7.30-a-day fee only for families making less than \$50,000. But as of April 1, the price would rise to \$8 for families earning \$75,000, and up to \$20 a day beyond that. A parent wouldn't have to pay more than the base rate for their third or any additional child.

Despite the hike, Quebec's subsidized daycare program is said to still be one of the least expensive in Canada.

"As many studies have shown, this universal program has had more than positive outcomes on the activities of mothers and the development of young children," the federation said in its brief to a legislative committee.

"It makes it all the more regrettable and incomprehensible in our eyes that the government imperils a program that is so precious and is the envy of the other Canadian provinces!"

Sylvie Lévesque, the federation's general manager, said the new fees would hurt single-parent families who are already feeling the pinch with rising hydro, food and transit costs.

She also criticized the proposed penalties that would have been imposed on parents who sign up their children for a full week of daycare but frequently keep them home.

Quebec has been toying with different ideas to cut down on these "ghost spots," which the family minister has said costs the province millions of dollars a year.

But Charbonneau announced at the end of the parliamentary commission on the daycare bill early Monday evening that she wouldn't fine parents for keeping their children home from daycare even if they were registered for the full week, as she had previously proposed.

"She isn't ready to go there," said Charles Robert, the cabinet's adjunct director of communications. "But she wants to sensitize parents to the principle of false (attendance) declarations."

Under the proposed bill, a child who is often absent could also be kicked out for three months, and a daycare with too many ghost places could be slapped with a fine of up to \$1,000.

Lévesque added in an interview that more and more parents are working irregular hours, and the nine-to-five, five-days a week daycare model doesn't meet their needs anymore.

The federation was one of the last groups to give its thoughts on the bill after three days of hearings. The committee will decide whether to make any amendments.

Founded in 1974, the federation is a voice for 40-odd associations representing single parents and families with children from a previous relationship. According to the 2011 census, there was a single breadwinner in 29 per cent of families with children in Quebec, numbering 366,000.

In their 2013 platform, the Liberals had vowed to keep the rate in public daycares indexed to inflation. Premier Couillard has said that breaking the promise to fulfill another - to rein in the deficit - was one of the most difficult choices he made in his first months in office.

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

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[4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/affordability> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/public-opinion> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding> [7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/demand>