

Daycare operators say changes will create unneeded spaces ^[1]

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EXCERPT

It's proving difficult to substantiate one of the Liberal government's main reasons for changes to daycare funding.

The Liberals plan to shift \$2.4 million in taxpayer money, taking it away from subsidies for daycare owner-operators and re-directing it to top-up the wages of new daycare employees.

Education Minister Serge Rousselle says it will help encourage the creation of more daycare spaces, a key Liberal election commitment.

But the owner-operators of existing daycares, who stand to lose the money, say there's no need for new daycare spaces.

"You can ask any daycare owner here today and ask them if they have a spot available, and they'll tell you they have a spot available," owner Connie Wheaton said during a recent protest at the legislature.

"The government has all our statistics. Every year we have to fill out how many spots. And we surveyed all of the daycares, 'Do you have a spot?' 'Yup.' 'Do you have a spot?' 'Yeah.'"

Wheaton says not only will she lose the subsidy, but the subsidy will end up funding unnecessary childcare centres that will compete with her facility.

"What he's actually doing is they're opening up more, so they're opening more competition for us," she said.

"How can we keep our doors open if you're opening up thousands of more spaces?"

The money comes from the Quality Improvement Funding Support program, which was set up to encourage better childcare.

The change affects about 260 owners of for-profit daycares, and the provincial government is adding another \$400,000 to the amount it is re-directing to new employees.

Central registry hasn't been established

CBC News asked the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for statistics on the number of daycare spaces in the province, but the department has yet to provide them.

The Liberals have promised to set up a central daycare registry to better track the availability of daycare spaces, but it's not operating yet.

Progressive Conservative Opposition MLA Jody Carr says if there's no way to accurately measure the need for new daycare spaces, the provincial government shouldn't be shifting money to try to create them.

Rousselle "has not made a sound decision based on facts," Carr said.

Employees of existing daycares already get the top-up of \$5 per hour for those who've followed a provincially certified training and \$3.07 per hour for those who haven't.

Wheaton says while there are plenty of spaces for children aged two to five, it's true there is still a shortage of spots for infants.

But she says that's where the provincial government should be focusing its efforts, rather than shifting money to subsidize new spots in general.

- reprinted from CBC News

Region: New Brunswick ^[3]

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