

Making the right choice: Investing in high quality early learning and child care in Ontario ^[1]

A submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs, Government of Ontario

Author: Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care

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Excerpts from submission: For three decades, parents have been advocating for governments to take action to remedy the abysmal state of child care services for Ontario's children. Piecemeal improvements took shape between 1982 and 1995. But the destruction to services over the last eight and a half years has been staggering. Between 1995 and 2003, funding cuts and downloading to municipalities destroyed many of the advances made to child care between 1985 and 1995 by successive Liberal and NDP governments. Child care in Ontario today is in crisis as never before. Not only is there no coherent system but also the supply of child care spaces needed to meet the needs of families with young children has been stagnant since 1995. Child care programs report financial crises, difficulty recruiting and retaining staff, escalating fees and deteriorating physical environments. As a result, many regulated child care programs struggle to deliver "developmental" environments. However, even when quality services are available, most families can not afford them. The OCBCC recommends four kinds of actions to this end: First, the Ontario government must keep its election promise to implement a universal, high quality, regulated, seamless system of early learning and child care and develop a strategy for meeting this commitment. Second, we call upon the Ontario government to develop the following policy framework and action plan for implementation to begin to put this system in place. The plan should be ready for implementation one year from now April 1, 2005. Third, the Ontario government must play a leadership role with the federal government and the other provinces and territories to move towards a national child care program. Fourth, the Ontario Government must take the following actions as immediate crisis control: Funding actions and policy actions Acting on these recommendations will advance the goal of a system of universal, high quality early learning and child care. These actions and plans would be a welcomed change from the devastating attacks of the Tory government, returning a sense of hope and optimism to the child care community and to Ontario parents. Equally important while universal child care is rarely in a three-year-old's vocabulary it would demonstrate that children are valued members of our society.

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