

Opposition condemns gov't plans to limit day care rights ^[1]

Author: Yle

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EXCERPTS

Opposition MPs had a bone to pick during Tuesday's parliamentary session, taking the government to task with fervour about its plan to limit the statutory right to day care in Finland to 20 hours a week. If the plan gets parliamentary approval, starting in August only children of full-time workers, students or entrepreneurs would be entitled to full-time day care services.

Finland's opposition parties are upset about government plans to limit residents' subjective day care rights. They believe the move would have serious repercussions, as it would be harmful to the children's development, make life more difficult for unemployed parents and cause exceeding large groups in the country's already-crowded day care centres.

"A sad day, a miserable proposal," said MP Mikaela Nylander of the Swedish People's Party.

The opposition stood united in its condemnation of the plan to create savings by cutting early education, saying it was badly short-sighted.

"The best interests of the children have been forgotten if ten thousand children's full-time spot is suddenly changed to part-time," said the Social Democratic Party MP Jukka Gustafsson.

MPs also reminded the ruling coalition that its proposed day care limit would go against their supposed principle of reducing bureaucracy, as municipalities would in future be required to check whether children were entitled to full-time or part-time day care on an individual basis.

The plan enjoys broad support among the coalition's Centre, National Coalition and Finns Parties. Finns Party MP Laura Huhtasaari wondered why there was so much resistance to the proposed change, as it would allow parents to spend more time with their children. She said her own spouse recently transitioned to a part-time position for the same reason.

According to the government's plan, subjective day care would be limited to 20 hours a week beginning next autumn. This would affect parents who are unemployed and parents where one of the spouses is on parental leave, among others.

Club fee hike also a concern

The government has also outlined a payment increase for Finland's morning and afternoon clubs arranged before and after school for young schoolchildren. This plan also received its fair share of criticism on Tuesday, with some of the coalition MPs even joining in.

Finns Party MP Mika Niikko asked the coalition to reconsider whether it was reasonable to demand the higher club prices.

If the proposal goes through, the monthly price of the clubs will go up from 60 euros to 120 euros per child. Morning and afternoon club fees haven't been increased since 2006, and the government hopes to gain 7 million euros in added municipal revenue with the move.

The opposition holds that the increase is too drastic, and fears the doubled price would prohibit many families from being able to pay for extracurricular activities for their children.

"There are countries in the world where leaving a child under 12 years of age home alone is considered a criminal offense," said Christian Democrat Party MP and Chair Sari Essayah during the session.

Social Democrat MP Eeva-Johanna Eloranta in turn fears that if the price prohibits children from attending the clubs, computers and tablets will become their afternoon entertainment – with no adults around to monitor what they are up to.

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Region: Europe ^[3]

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Links

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