

Children, families and workers kicked to the curb as Sault Ste. Marie council votes to close all city-run daycare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Sault Ste. Marie City councillors have dealt a devastating blow to the families of some 100 children who attend city-operated child care centres, as council voted 9 to 4 last night to get out of the day care business by the end of 2017. The move ends a 40-year tradition of municipal child care in the city.

The decision also affects dozens of registered early childhood educators (RECEs) and educational assistants who are employed by the City of Sault Ste. Marie.

"After little more than two hours' debate, Sault Ste. Marie city councillors threw the lives of families, children and workers into turmoil," said Connie Hurtubise of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the union that represents municipal child care workers.

Carolyn Ferns, Public Policy and Government Relations Coordinator with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, offered further comment to the proceedings: "We listened as councillor after councillor repeated fatuous and false arguments about the market taking care of any waiting lists for child care. They showed absolutely no awareness or understanding of the way the child care system works in our city or province - or the realities of the families who desperately need reliable, affordable care."

Supporters of municipally delivered child care agreed with councillors on one issue: that the cause of the current crisis should be laid at the door of the provincial government, which two years ago introduced changes to the child care funding formula that led to a loss of funding for municipal day care.

"We don't intend to stay quiet about this fiasco," said Martha Friendly, Executive Director of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit. "This latest decision makes the need for proper funding and a comprehensive provincial policy for child care all the more urgent. At the root of this vote is the Ontario government's downloading to local governments with no provincial policy to speak of."

The City of Sault Ste. Marie already has hundreds of children on waiting lists for child care; the centre closures will have the effect of increasing those numbers as well as pushing dozens of trained child care professionals into unemployment.

"Many residents, be they workers or parents with children, may have to leave the area if child care is too hard to find. This is a short-sighted and alarming decisions that will cause harm to our community for years to come," said CUPE's Hurtubise.

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