

Infants are not toddlers: Provincial child care changes prompt petition, worry from parents, day care workers ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Infants aren't toddlers and shouldn't be lumped together in daycares, say parents, local politicians and daycare workers who gathered at a Thursday rally against proposed provincial changes to child care.

Children, staff and parents gathered outside ABC Day Nursery on Lauzon Road along with CUPE officials, Windsor-Tecumseh MP Cheryl Hardcastle and Windsor West MPP Lisa Gretzky for a rally against the changes they say will harm children, decrease the quality of care and push daycares to increase their fees and perhaps not offer care for infants.

"Kids are going to get run over," Alicia De La Hamaide, a registered early childhood educator, said of putting infants with energetic toddlers who are walking and may be in the biting and hitting stage. "There are less people there to protect them and more kids there to hurt them."

De La Hamaide, who started a provincewide petition to try to stop proposed Ministry of Education changes to age groupings and staff to child ratios, asked parents, grandparents and educators to make their voices heard against the changes before an April 1 comment deadline.

Currently, infants are defined as newborns to 18 months but De La Hamaide said new regulations for licensed child care would define infants as newborns to 12 months old. It means they would be put in rooms with toddlers six months earlier and toddlers would in turn be mixed in with preschoolers six months earlier at age two, she said.

"With these new changes spending quality time with these infants will no longer be possible," said De La Hamaide, who works for ABC Day Nursery. "We as early childhood educators will be too busy performing crowd control."

Kim Gilbert is a registered early childhood educator, a union rep for 80 CUPE Local 543 child care workers in Windsor and a new mom of her four-month-old son Milo who was wearing and "I'm not a toddler" shirt. When her maternity leave is done she worries her son will be put in with toddlers, which will hurt the quality of care and push him into a room with active toddlers and less staff.

"It is time we stand together to fight back and say no," Gilbert said to a cheer from the crowd.

The Ministry of Education is getting comments on phase two of changes to the Child Care and Early Years Act.

"The proposed changes would not result in babies and toddlers being cared for in larger groups with fewer adults," ministry spokeswoman May Nazar said late Thursday in an emailed response. "They would provide better protection by increasing the minimum number of qualified staff from one to two in infant, toddler and preschool age groups."

She said the government is "proposing changes to age grouping, ratios, group size and staff qualifications to strengthen quality, increase access and reflect the feedback we received from child care licensees and other early years partners in response to past consultations."

Gretzky, who is the Ontario NDP education critic, said it's not too late to oppose the changes which she called a step backwards.

"It's quite concerning to hear that now we're going to take even younger children and, as Cheryl (Hardcastle) has pointed out, it's basically warehousing them. We can't make this change," Gretzky said.

So far the petition has more than 1,000 signatures and parents who took petitions Thursday were asked to drop them off at any ABC Day Nursery in Windsor or the CUPE Local 543 office on Parent Avenue by March 23 so they can be presented to Gretzky March 29 at 3:30 p.m.

-reprinted from Windsor Star

Region: Ontario ^[3]

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