

Parti Québécois, unions call on government to abandon daycare fee hikes ^[1]

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Source: CBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 15 Mar 2016

AVAILABILITY

Read online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

A day after former premier Pauline Marois blasted the Liberals over daycare cuts, more than 25,000 postcards signed by parents and daycare workers were hand-delivered Tuesday to the premier's office.

The Couillard government is cutting \$120 million from daycare budgets this year — all while increasing fees for parents.

"Stop these cuts," said Sylvain Pagé, the Parti Quebecois' family critic. "Return to the universal fee that we've had in place now for nearly 20 years."

Last April, the government scrapped the universal system, replacing it with a sliding scale.

If a parent has a child in a subsidized spot, \$7.55 a day is paid directly to the daycare operator. An additional fee, based on household income will be charged when parents file their income taxes next month. For some parents, it could mean owing the government as much as \$2,300 per child.

'This is nonsense'

The postcards are part of a campaign by the CSN, a Quebec labour federation, to prevent what it sees as the systematic dismantling of the public daycare system.

The CSN represents about 22,000 daycare educators.

Lucie Longchamps, the CSN's representative for subsidized home daycares, also runs her own daycare.

Since the government announced the increased fees, she says many parents have made the "heartbreaking" decision to pull their children out of subsidized home daycares in search of cheaper options.

She says many families have placed their children in private, unsubsidized daycares. Families receive a tax rebate from the government depending on how much they make.

Other families have turned to private, home daycares which are not regulated by the government.

"These children will end up in poorly regulated, poorly supervised environments," said Longchamps. "For us, this is nonsense."

Longchamps says a recent survey of its home daycare operators showed there are more than 900 unfilled places.

"This is unheard of," said Longchamps.

Home daycare operators also concerned

The CSN's cry for help comes a day after a CBC Montreal investigation showed many home daycare operators fear the fee increase will put them out of business.

The Fédération des intervenantes en petite enfance du Quebec, (FIPEQ) which also represents home daycare workers, is also reporting hundreds of vacant spots.

Although these daycares are regulated and regularly inspected, they are not part of the government's centralized website La Place 0-5, where parents can find available daycare spots.

"It (subsidized home daycares) is a model that should be better known and we must stop saying that it's all the same thing because it's not," said Longchamps.

A typical subsidized home daycare is licensed for six children. Missing spots put many operators in a precarious financial situation, says

Longchamps.

On Monday, the CSN released a video of Marois, arguing daycares are a "jewel" that must be protected.

The public program was introduced in 1997 when she was the province's education minister.

As premier, she was planning to raise the daily fee to \$8 in 2014 and \$9 in 2015.

When CBC News asked the Couillard government about its commitment to subsidized home daycares, a spokeswoman said that it supports a parent's right to decide what daycare environment is best for their child.

-reprinted from CBC News

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