

Parents urge province to ban daycare wait list fees ^[1]

Author: Monsebraaten, Laurie

Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 1 Apr 2016

AVAILABILITY

Read online ^[2]

EXCERPTS

Like most first-time Toronto parents, Nadine Blum knew she would have to put her name on numerous child-care wait lists if she hoped to get a spot for her son.

But she wasn't expecting to pay for the privilege to get in line behind scores of other parents desperate for daycare.

"I must have been on 20 to 30 lists, I lost track of the number," said Blum, 38. "But what really surprised me were the fees to get on those lists."

About one-third of the Toronto daycares Blum contacted charge non-refundable wait list fees. While most asked for \$20 or \$30, one non-profit centre charged \$120, she said.

When a private centre charged \$150, she balked.

"I asked to speak to the manager because I thought the worker was trying to scam me," she said in an interview.

In the end, Blum secured a toddler space in a downtown centre that doesn't charge wait list fees in December. But as an associate at Goldblatt Partners LLP — a labour law firm that often tackles broader social justice issues — she and fellow lawyer Kelly Doctor decided to do something about the centres that do charge.

Later this month, Blum's local MPP, Arthur Potts, will present their petition to the legislature, calling on the government to ban non-refundable daycare wait list fees in Ontario.

The scarcity of daycare across the province — in Toronto there are spots for just 21 per cent of children under age 5 — means parents are forced to put their names on multiple wait lists. And at costs ranging from \$10 to more than \$100, wait list fees "impose a significant financial burden on parents and caregivers for the mere opportunity to access quality child care," the petition reads.

What's worse, it's impossible to tell if wait lists are being administered fairly.

"Child care should be a public good and not just another commodity," Blum said. "It should not be operating on a supply-and-demand basis. These fees are just another example of how messed up our system is."

Not only do wait list fees discriminate against low-income parents, but the lack of transparency leaves the system open to abuse, said Potts, the Liberal MPP for Beaches-East York.

"Since there's no way of knowing where you are on the list, how do you know some other parent hasn't come along and put down an additional \$150 to move them up five spots?" he said in an interview.

Potts, who hopes the petition will put daycares on notice, said he is willing to introduce a private member's bill if he can't convince the government to add the item as a new regulation to the provincial Child Care Act.

Although there has been no research into the prevalence of wait list fees, they were one of the top complaints listed by parents in a 2012 city of Toronto consultation on child care, said Councillor Janet Davis (Ward 31, Beaches-East York.)

"I was quite surprised by the number of people who commented about the challenge of navigating the system and the wait lists, particularly if you are low-income and you are on two wait lists, one for a subsidy and one for a spot," she said.

As a result, city council voted last summer to ban wait list fees starting in January 2017 for all Toronto daycares that receive funding from the city, about 670 out of 953 licensed centres.

But that won't help parents in other communities across the province, said Martha Friendly, executive director of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

"It is good that Toronto is doing this, but this is a provincial policy matter," she said. "It is one more barrier to parents who are already struggling to find care and it is something the province should address. I don't see any justification for it."

Voices from the parents:

"It's frustrating to put all of these deposits down when you know most, if not all, will never amount to a space," says Sara Ehrhardt who estimates she and her spouse Glenn Gustafson have spent about \$400 on wait list fees in their quest to secure a spot for their son Clarence.

"The province should definitely ban the practice. For some families, that wait list fee is groceries for the week," says Megan Ramsay, who put her daughter Sophie's name on three daycare wait lists in Peel and Halton Regions. One centre charged a \$40 non-refundable deposit.

"Wait list maintenance is a huge administrative burden on already cash-strapped daycares in the city," says Erinn Meloche, who has spent about \$150 in wait list fees. "The problem is a much bigger one and I tend not to agree with anything that further burdens daycares themselves. A full overhaul of early childhood education in the province is needed." Meloche was charged wait list fees at about half of the 15 daycares she chose in the city's east end. While she has secured a spot for Drew, 1, she is still looking for a full-time space for Spencer, 3.

-reprinted from Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: access ^[4]

fees ^[5]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/16/04/parents-urge-province-ban-daycare-wait-list-fees>
Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/16/04/parents-urge-province-ban-daycare-wait-list-fees> [2]

<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2016/04/01/parents-urge-province-to-ban-daycare-wait-list-fees.html> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/access> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/fees>