

Ottawa daycare could close due to government rent increase ^[1]

Author: Ritchie, Haley

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EXCERPTS

An Ottawa daycare located in the Statistics Canada building at Tunney's Pasture is asking the federal government to back down on a rent increase that could force the daycare to close permanently.

With childcare costs on the rise, the move is putting some parents on edge.

"In the next six, seven or eight months do I have to start paying \$300 more a month for the privilege of sending my son to French daycare? That's a difficult financial decision," said Dominique Simoneau-Ritchie, who sends her 16-month-old son, Wyatt, to the Garderie Tunney's Daycare.

The daycare was originally started with a grant from Statistics Canada. In 2014, new policies meant the nonprofit began paying the government \$82,000 in yearly rent, with an agreement to start paying \$150,000 in 2016.

With their rent nearly doubling on July 1, the daycare is announcing it may have to close if the federal government doesn't agree to a rent freeze.

"The only option is to raise fees... and we don't think parents will be able to afford that," said Olivier Marois, president of the daycare's board of directors.

The bilingual daycare currently has 49 children enrolled and employs 15 full-time and three part-time employees. The majority of parents are public servants and the daycare also offers subsidized spots for low-income families.

Marois said moving the daycare is not possible because of the financial challenges of re-applying for licensing with a new space.

"We reopened negotiations with [Public Services and Procurement Canada] in November because the Liberal government came into play and they have an agenda of childcare and gender equality, we thought maybe they would listen to us," he said.

In March, the daycare received a blunt letter with a final decision from Public Services Minister Judy Foote. The daycare was granted a final three-month extension "to allow the daycare to transition and provide adequate notice to parents."

Metro reached out to Public Services and Procurement Canada and Treasury Board over the holiday weekend for comment, but did not receive a response.

"I want the government to realize that these institutions are extremely valuable. They're not like other businesses and they should be given a break because they can't operate this way," said Marois.

After being waitlisted when she was pregnant, Simoneau-Ritchie is worried about what will happen if it closes.

She said Garderie Tunney's Daycare is the only francophone option nearby for her son, who is still considered an infant.

Infant spaces for children under 18 months are currently \$1,690 per month at the daycare and Simoneau-Ritchie said many parents couldn't cope with a further increase in costs.

"There are only three daycares in our neighbourhood that will consider taking a child under a year old," she said.

"It's extremely important to keep Tunney's open if we want to be able to cater to women who want to go back to work sooner."

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Region: Ontario ^[3]

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