

East Toronto parents, politicians lament lack of available, affordable child care ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A small group of parents gathered recently at Kimbourne United Church on Wolverleigh Boulevard to discuss ways to improve child care in east Toronto.

Thirty parents and child care providers came together at a meeting hosted by councillors Janet Davis and Paula Fletcher, and Toronto District School Board Trustee Jennifer Story, to brainstorm ways to push the Province of Ontario to address the lack of available and affordable child care in the area. Carolyn Ferns, public policy and government relations co-ordinator for the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, spoke at the meeting, eager to help push the issue as well.

"I think that child care is one of the most essential social policy issues in Canada right now," said Ferns. "We need to convince Ontario that they can be a leader again on this."

The meeting was originally planned to discuss the Ontario government's proposed changes to child care age groups, staff ratios, and group sizes. Those proposals were since withdrawn by the province after a landslide of negative feedback from parents and child experts. Instead, the meeting was used to consult with parents about child care issues on which they want Ontario to take action.

Lack of access and affordability were top of the list for parents at the meeting.

Jamie Jennings and his wife have been on several child care waiting lists since she became pregnant. Their child is now eight months old, and they still haven't found a space.

"We really don't know what to do," said Jennings. "She's going to have to go back to work, and I work, and we might have to bring in someone to the home and we cannot afford to do that."

The situation is scary, he added, and keeping him up at night.

Jennings and his wife are just two of many Toronto parents faced with the prospect of not being able to work due to a lack of available and affordable child care, an issue Fletcher pointed out affects more than individual families.

"It's a problem, a systemic problem, for the economy," she said. "This city, this country, cannot run without child care. It's not just a family issue, it's not just a women's issue, it's not just looking after our kids. It's about an economy that allows everybody to work in it."

Wait-list fees is another issue brought up at the meeting, with parents lamenting having to pay to be on wait-lists that might never yield them a child care spot.

Davis noted Toronto has banned child care centres from charging wait-list fees, effective Jan. 1, 2017.

Beaches-East York MPP Arthur Potts introduced a bill May 16 that proposed banning the practice throughout Ontario. The bill also called for more transparency, to let parents know where they are on wait-lists and how admission is offered, another concern voiced by parents at the meeting.

On May 17, the Ministry of Education announced a proposal to do both effective Sept. 1. Visit www.bit.ly/1rX2C46 ^[3] to get more information or submit comments about the ministry's proposal. Feedback will be accepted until July 4.

During the meeting, Sharon Smith, who has a five-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son, said location can be a problem as well.

"My issues were finding a space that was close to where they were going to school," she said. "That's difficult when you have two of two different ages, and you've got to get them both close by or to the school, because there's no point in having care that's subsidized that's nowhere near the school that your child's going to go to, because how do you get them there? Now you've got to pay somebody else to take your child from the daycare to the school. That's, I found, even worse."

On the affordability issue, one parent noted she has to pay \$21,000 yearly for child care. Ontario is said to have the most expensive child care costs in Canada. Before- and after-school care for kindergarten kids is another issue mentioned at the meeting, along with a need for more support for children with special needs.

The meeting finished with brainstorming about how to rally community support to press the province to address the issues.

“It got my brain working,” said Davis. “We’ve always looked at approaches that are city-wide. I’ve been involved in city-wide, or province-wide, but maybe we just need a local campaign, and to put our voices together locally. These are the priorities of our parents, and these are the concerns of our parents locally.”

-reprinted from Inside Toronto

Region: Ontario ^[4]

Tags: affordability ^[5]

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