

Childcare shortages, costs a 'human rights violation': law report ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

When Anna Geeroms was pregnant with twins five years ago, like most expecting parents she planned ahead for childcare.

But the Vancouver business analyst discovered there were no daycare spaces available nearby. So she got on a waitlist. And she waited.

Her twins reached six months, and Geeroms still had heard nothing.

"I realized that it was not likely that we would get childcare spaces in that facility by the time I was scheduled to return to work," she lamented. "After additional research, I placed my twins on waitlists with 11 more licensed childcare providers.

"I was scheduled to go back to work one year after the twins were born, and at that time we still had not heard from any of the childcare facilities we were waitlisted for."

Two years without success, she had to hire a nanny for \$21,000 a year. The now-39-year-old's testimony forms one of 15 affidavits collected from across B.C. by lawyers with West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) for a new report, released Tuesday.

The study - titled *High Stakes: The Impacts of Child Care on the Human Rights of Women and Children* - looks at the legal ramifications of significant shortages and high costs for families in the province.

The lawyers and researchers behind the study conclude that finding childcare isn't just a nuisance for parents. It actually may violate the rights of women and children.

"In our view, it violates both women and children's equality rights under the Charter, and also their right to security of person," Kendra Milne, the organization's director of law reform, told Metro in an interview in West Coast LEAF's offices. "Because women do the majority of caring for children in B.C., access to childcare services disproportionately impacts them - it creates an equality violation."

Last year, the monthly median cost of childcare for an infant was \$1,225 per month - though West Coast LEAF's participants said they paid nearly \$600 more than that.

For women in poverty or fleeing abusive partners, Milne said, the impact of such a monthly cost is more than just a debt sentence however.

"We found it creates really significant harms," she said, "ranging from being stuck in cycles of poverty, to creating barriers for women trying to flee abuse, to putting the parent-child relationship at risk and putting children at risk of being apprehended."

The B.C. government offers childcare subsidies for 20,000 children, spending \$120 million annually according to an earlier statement. And the Ministry of Children and Family Development has budgeted nearly \$330 million on childcare services this year, including a fund to help providers keep their operating costs down.

"The province is committed to supporting sustainable child care in order that families can choose from a range of affordable, safe, quality child care options," said a ministry spokesperson last October.

Milne, whose organization launched a women's free legal clinic in Vancouver to offer pro bono family law services in May, said the data could potentially form the basis for litigation - but so far, no one's been able to test a link between childcare and human rights in court.

For Geerom, it took three years before her efforts bore fruit. In 2014, one of her waitlisted daycares called offering her twins a spot. But for many other B.C. parents in the legal study, the impacts remain steep.

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Region: British Columbia ^[3]

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