

May 14 2014

To the leaders of Ontario's three main political parties

Dear Ms. Horwath, Mr. Hudak and Ms. Wynne:

Last week, several concerned groups, together with parents, educators and advocates, held a news conference to draw attention to concerns about the state of early childhood education and child care in Ontario. We challenged you—the party leaders seeking to become the next premier of Ontario—to take the opportunity offered by the provincial election to respond thoroughly to these concerns by committing to six points (outlined below). We noted that child care complements each of the parties' campaign approaches—whether it is creating jobs, helping real people, or making sense.

We very much appreciate that each of you took the time to respond to the early childhood education and child care issue so quickly following our media conference.

We noted that the state of child care in Ontario is grim – spaces cover only about 20% of 0-5 year olds, fees are completely out of families' reach and subsidies are scarce, early childhood educators' wages fail to reflect the value of the work. Infants, toddlers and children with disabilities are especially left out of regulated child care. Full-day kindergarten is not well integrated with child care and fails to meet many of the child care needs of four and five year olds. Quality, especially in the for-profit (and growing corporate) child care sector, is too often too low to be considered “developmental”. Most families still rely on unlicensed child care arrangements, occasionally with tragic results. At the same time, needed child care centres are threatened with closure as provincial funds are scheduled to be reduced in 18 municipalities across Ontario.

Many years of starts, shifts and cuts add up to inadequate public funding and ineffectual provincial policy. This means that child care in Ontario is still—in this day and age—a scarce commodity, not a valued public service as it is in some countries. Surely Ontario can and should do better.

We say that it's time for this situation to end.

During this election campaign, Ontario families need a complete response from those seeking to form government—a package of immediate, short-term and long-term remedies. Our six points, which we provide below, address selected key elements of a strategy to begin to fix early childhood education and child care. Point 1 details an overarching consideration: child care needs a complete system overhaul—a long-term plan and policy. We're asking you to commit to this as part of beginning to make this happen.

If my party forms the next government, I, as the Ontario premier will:

1. Immediately begin development of a full, comprehensive, long-term, evidence-based ECEC policy framework with principles, goals and targets and timetables.
2. Retable Bill 143 and continue the normal legislative and public process of debate, comment, amendment and passage.
3. Set aside the December 2013 regulation changes, which should be considered only within a comprehensive policy framework.
4. Reintroduce the proposed wage increase as a first step to real changes in the status of the child care workforce.
5. Recognizing the severe underfunding of Ontario child care, commit to new child care money (in addition to the wage increase) in its first budget—a \$300 million fund (annualized) to address immediate crises such as cuts to 18 municipalities through changes to the funding formula, centre viability, municipal subsidy waiting lists, family child care agency funding, and so on.
6. Take leadership with other provinces/territories and the federal government to put a national child care program back on the political agenda.

Thank you for considering these important issues. We recognize that there have already been election pledges on early childhood education and child care. We know, however, that these are still early days in this campaign and are hoping to see further positive commitments from all parties as it continues.

We are intending to release a report card detailing all parties' early childhood education and child care platforms and proposals before E-day on June 12.

Thank you.



Association of Early Childhood Educators, Ontario



Canadian Union of Public Employees (Ontario)



Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care



Childcare Resource and Research Unit



Advocates for Progressive Childcare Policy