

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

Working for a non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible and accountable.

3rd Floor, 210 West Broadway, Vancouver, British Columbia V5Y 3W2
tel: 604.709.5661 www.cccabc.bc.ca fax: 604.709.5662

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Introduction

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) is a voluntary non-profit organization of parents, child care providers, interested citizens, and community organizations.

We support:

- ✓ The development of a comprehensive, accessible, and affordable non-profit child care system in B.C. and across Canada.
- ✓ The right of every child and family to quality child care in their community.
- ✓ A range of inclusive licensed and regulated child care choices including full and part-time programs in family and centre-based settings.
- ✓ Stable, adequate government funding to sustain quality child care programs.
- ✓ Child care worker's rights to wages and working conditions which reflect the level of training, responsibility and value of work performed.

The Deepening Child Care Crisis in BC

Over the last two and a half years, the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC has monitored, with growing alarm, the negative impact of provincial funding cuts on regulated child care in BC. We have informed government and the community about the declining state of access to child care; we have made concrete recommendations about how government can support a high quality, affordable, accessible child care system and we have supported and encouraged parents and others across BC to tell their elected representatives why the current provincial child care policies are not working.

Yet, despite the efforts of thousands of British Columbians, the provincial government has not listened and things are getting worse not better. While government continues to speak in positive and optimistic terms about its child care policy, the reality for children, families and communities is very different.

As the committee charged with the goal of recommending ways in which the next provincial budget can deliver "a sustainable child care system that meets the needs of families", it is essential that you understand the current situation.

[Source: http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/sp2003/caws/caws_child_link1.htm]

Here are just some of the facts that you should know:

- ✓ As a result of cuts to the child care subsidy program, many low and moderate income children are being withdrawn from licensed child care programs because their families cannot afford to pay the fees. In a survey of 700 caregivers across BC in the fall of 2002, 57% of caregivers reported that they had fewer subsidized children in their child care programs.
- ✓ Despite the research proving that quality care promotes healthy childhood development while poor quality care can do harm, a growing number of BC children are in temporary, make shift child care arrangements because their families have no other choice. Our contacts across BC report that many families can only afford the 'cheapest' care available and that school aged children are increasingly left on their own. These factors are associated with poorer quality care that leads to less than optimal childhood development outcomes.
- ✓ Programs that serve low and moderate income communities are closing or in danger of closing because the families they serve cannot afford to pay fees. Programs that serve more affluent communities where parents can afford to pay full fees are full.
- ✓ The amount of funds a child care program receives under the new child care operating grant is based on enrollment. Programs that are full, generally because families can afford to pay fees, receive MORE money from the provincial government than programs that are under enrolled. Public funds are disproportionately supporting care for children from affluent families.
- ✓ As opposed to previous provincial child care funding there is no longer a requirement that the current child care operating funding be used to keep fees affordable or wages at an adequate level. As long as enrollment reports are accurate, child care employers can use the funds for anything they choose. The result is that fees are on the increase and wages are on the decline. This negatively affects access, quality and stability of care.

The Root Causes of the Child Care Crisis

The underlying causes of the growing crisis in child care rest firmly at the feet of the provincial government. Here's why:

- ✓ Over a three year period (2002 – 2005) the provincial government has cut or has announced its intentions to cut close to \$50 million from spending on regulated child care.
- ✓ Federal transfer funds that should be used to improve licensed child care in BC are being used to cover up some of the biggest problems caused by provincial spending cuts.

- ✓ The government is making a false and dangerous separation between child care and early childhood development policies and funding. Like in the 1970's and 1980's, child care is once again seen as a labour force attachment strategy for poor women - with little or no concern for the quality of the care their children receive. At the same time, government purports to demonstrate its commitment to 'early childhood development' by providing small grants to a patchwork of programs that, while perhaps beneficial for some, do nothing to address the developmental needs of 388,900 children in BC under the age of 12 whose mothers are in the paid labour force.

Recommendations

Regrettably, our recommendations are not new. However, the need to act on them becomes more urgent with every passing day.

We therefore strongly urge the committee to recommend that the 2003/04 provincial budget support the development of a child care system that meets the needs of all children and families:

1. Restore provincial spending on child care to 2000/01 levels. Reverse funding cuts that have been made to date and halt any further projected cuts.
2. Develop and implement a 5 year plan that moves child care from the current user fee system to a publicly funded system.
3. Ensure that public funding for child care is used to support quality care for children, affordable fees for parents and adequate wages and working condition for those who care for our children.
4. Use federal early childhood and child care transfer payments to supplement rather than replace provincial spending on child care.
5. End the current separation between child care and early childhood development policies and recognize child care as a cornerstone of a comprehensive early years strategy.