

March 30th, 2012

Response to: MCFD STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL PLAN WORKING DRAFT

Submitted by: Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC)

The CCCABC is providing the following feedback on the recently released MCFD Strategic and Operational Plan Working Draft.

Given the very short time lines provided for community input, this is only our initial response to a long awaited Early Years Plan from MCFD. Our comments speak to the EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD CARE section of the document and focus on child care

1. Significantly, the Working Draft affirms that with only enough licensed spaces for 15% of BC's children and yet 80% of women working, the lack of available and affordable quality child care poses a serious challenge for BC families. In fact, almost all BC Success by Six Tables confirm that lack of access to child care is the biggest challenge facing families with young children. For many years, we have worked to inform government of this looming crisis because, the first step in solving a problem is to acknowledge its existence.
2. We are also pleased to see that the document acknowledges the short and long term benefits of quality child care for all children, families, communities and the economy. (Page 25/26). This evidence supports a central role for child care in an overall strategy of supporting children and families.
3. That said, we wish to highlight 3 important areas where the MCFD analysis could and should be strengthened;
 - a. While the analysis summarizes the international evidence about the importance of quality child care, it is silent on BC and Canada's relative failure to provide access when compared to other developed countries and economies. This international comparison makes it clear that solutions are possible and should be referenced to help move the issue up the list of priorities.

- b. The analysis fails to clearly differentiate between funding for child care and other ECD services. Most ECD services are funded through contracts between government and the operating agencies. These ECD programs are available, as they should be, at little or no cost to families.” (p25) By contrast, child care remains a user-fee system with limited public funds delivered through a problematic subsidy program and a small operating grant (CCOF) which covers only about 10% of operating costs. Child care services have no option but to raise most of their operating revenue through parent fees. Without a clear understanding of this fundamental difference, solutions designed to improve the contracted sector will not solve the child care crisis.

With fees at commercial child care chains now approaching \$2000 per month per child (Kids & Company), it is clear that the crisis is worsening for parents. Commercial child care, which prioritizes profits over the needs of children and families, is not the right direction for BC and Canada.

- c. Finally, the working draft seems confused on its use of the terms ECD and child care. In places, ECD is an umbrella term, presumably including child care. In others, ECD is defined as a separate component under the umbrella. This perpetuates an unfortunate and false divide between child care, early childhood development and early learning. The reality is that families view these functions as complimentary and quality services incorporate all three.
4. Given MCFD’s relatively accurate description of the child care crisis, we are particularly disappointed and perplexed by the proposed Key Resulting Actions. Try as we might, we see no clear solutions for the problems families face. Many of the proposed actions seem to focus on the internal health of MCFD rather than on clear timelines and targets for making all ECD services – including child care – high quality, available, and affordable. Where quality is addressed, the implication is that MCFD will produce more guidelines, outcomes and frameworks without providing the resources that communities need to achieve these goals or for that matter to meet the current service demand.
 5. We particularly note the KRAs related to ECD coalitions and hub models. We are of course supportive of ensuring that democratic community-based bodies have the mandate and resources to provide children and families access to the services they need. That said, and as noted above, without fundamental reform in the funding of child care services, these initiatives are likely to once again, leave child care as the un-funded partner at the table.
 6. Finally, we note that the Draft indicates that MCFD has already engaged in consultation with the community and intends to do more. Other than one forum we attended, where child care was explicitly NOT on the agenda, we are not aware of any consultation with the child care sector.

However, as you know, over the last 2 years, we have been engaged in extensive community outreach and consensus building on child care – resulting in our Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning. We began in 2010 when we took an Emerging Plan to hundreds of parents, early childhood educators, other early years service providers and others across BC.

Based on their feedback, we finalized and released the Plan last spring. Subsequent community briefings have included a broad range of provincial elected officials and public servants including many

from MCFD. The level of support for the Plan is unprecedented. To date, almost a thousand individuals in over 90 BC communities and a growing and substantial number of municipalities, school districts, ECD tables and labour and community organizations, as well as noted academics, have endorsed and supported the Plan. We encourage you to review the support the Plan has garnered at <http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/plan/endorse-the-plan/organizational-support/>

We are pleased to offer MCFD this community based, concrete, innovative solution to the child care challenges that you identify. Without it, we regrettably agree that "...meeting the evolving child care needs of families in British Columbia continues to be an on-going challenge."

We hope that these comments are helpful as you move from draft to a final plan. As noted above, the tight timeline for community input does not provide the opportunity for a more fully developed response at this time. We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you to discuss these and related issues in more detail at your earliest convenience.

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