

Consolidated Clause from Report No. 5 of the Community Services Committee, as adopted by the Council of the City of Toronto at its meeting held on July 22, 23 and 24, 2003.

**2a****The Child Care Policy Platforms of the  
Three Provincial Political Parties and Their  
Implications for Toronto's Child Care System**

*(City Council on July 22, 23 and 24, 2003, adopted this Clause, without amendment.)*

(City Council on June 24, 25 and 26, 2003, deferred consideration of this Clause to the next regular meeting of City Council scheduled to be held on July 22, 2003.)

**The Community Services Committee recommends:**

- (a) the adoption of the report dated May 15, 2003, from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services;**
- (b) the adoption of the following recommendation of the Children and Youth Action Committee contained in the communication dated May 30, 2003, from the City Clerk:**
  - “that a high-profile campaign to press for the direct flow-through of Federal funds for child care be approved”;**
- (c) that the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services be directed to pursue the option of using City supported TTC shelter advertising space to keep the issue of licensed child care on the public agenda;**
- (d) that the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services be directed to send copies of the brochure “A New Deal for Child Care in Toronto” to parents with children on the waiting list for a subsidized child care space in Toronto”; and**
- (e) that Members of Council be encouraged to become actively engaged in spreading the message of the Toronto Child Care Campaign and use materials developed to speak with parents and colleagues at the provincial and federal levels of government.**

The Community Services Committee reports, for the information of Council, having requested the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services to provide Members of Council with short articles that could be used in their newsletters.

**The Community Services Committee submits the following report (May 15, 2003) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services:**

Purpose:

This report compares the key components of the child care policy platforms of the three provincial political parties and considers the future implications for Toronto's child care system.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no immediate financial impacts of this report on the approved 2003 operating budget. Longer term funding implications are suggested but cannot be quantified at this time given the lack of detail concerning future child care reform direction. The financial implications of this report have been discussed with the Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer who concurs with the impact statement.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) the City continue the "Toronto Child Care Campaign" to keep the issue of adequately funded licensed child care on the public agenda;
- (2) during the next provincial election, the City seek the commitment of all provincial parties to stabilize, restore and support the City's licensed child care system by committing to the speedy implementation of the 8-point short-term strategy for child care outlined in this report;
- (3) the City seek clarification from all political parties concerning the details of their platforms for child care to better analyze the impact of any future child care reform strategies on the City's current child care system; and
- (4) the appropriate City officials take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

The \$11.8 million decline in provincial child care subsidy since 1999 was discussed during the City's review and approval of the 2003 Operating Budget. In recognition of the extreme financial pressure being faced by the City's child care system, in response to the resulting 1,600 space reduction in subsidized service levels in 2002, and in anticipation of a provincial election in the near future, staff were asked to prepare a report on the child care policy platforms of the provincial Progressive Conservative, Liberal, and New Democratic Parties. This report compares the key components of each party's approach to child care and considers the immediate and future implications for Toronto's child care system.

Thousands of families in Toronto depend on licensed, quality child care without which many parents would be unable to work or attend school and many children would lose the daily benefits of early learning and play. The City of Toronto is committed to sustaining a high quality

child care system and is contributing more than its fair share to the cost. Toronto's entire child care system, both subsidized and non-subsidized, is at risk because of provincial funding cuts. Over 1,600 subsidized child care spaces were lost in 2002 because of inadequate provincial funding; the Province cut its funding for 200 Ontario Works child care spaces as of April 1, 2003; up to 500 more subsidized child care spaces may be lost in 2003 unless more provincial funding is committed to match the City's approved contribution. The City estimates that up to \$18.6 million of the federal funds available to the Province through the federal Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) and the new National Child Care Plan must be invested in Toronto's child care system to recover the service levels already lost, to prevent further service erosion and to sustain the system in the longer term.

#### Policy Platforms of the Three Provincial Parties:

To date, only the Liberal and the New Democratic Parties have publicly launched their policy platforms, which are entitled "Best Start Plan" and "Publicpower", respectively. Excerpts from these two platforms are provided in Appendix 1. While the Progressive Conservative Party has not yet released a new policy platform, the provincial government's actions with respect to child care eloquently communicate the party's policy direction. The provincial government has consistently taken an "Anything But Child Care" (ABC) approach throughout its present term in office. To date, none of the Federal ECDI money has been allocated to child care. Child care was not included in the Provincial Early Years Plan and has not been funded as part of the Ontario Early Years Centre Initiative. There was no mention of funding for child care in the most recent provincial budget or throne speech and the Province only reluctantly signed the new federal/provincial child care agreement, which allows a very broad definition of "regulated" child care. The Province has yet to commit to spending any of the new federal funds on licensed child care. There is already some suggestion that the provincial government may use some of this federal funding to develop an accreditation program for informal child care to replace the current licensed child care system.

The Liberal Party policy platform related to child care is known as the "Best Start Plan". It promises an income-based approach to child care subsidy that commits a maximum of \$15.00 per day for households earning \$25,000.00 with a gradual reduction to \$5.00 a day for those earning \$75,000.00. Those earning less than \$25,000.00 who now receive full subsidies will retain them. The Liberal Party platform focuses on children aged 0 to 4 years. It envisages child care as a seamless extension of the school system, which would be mandated to provide full day Junior and Senior kindergarten. The Liberal Party plan is silent on capital development and appears to rely heavily on expansion within the regulated home child care sector to address currently unmet child care needs.

While detailed plans are not yet available, it appears that under the Liberal Party plan some Toronto families currently in receipt of fee subsidy assistance could be made ineligible and that other families would receive less fee assistance thereby restricting their choice to use quality licensed care. For families with infants and toddlers, the proposed \$15.00 per day subsidy will not cover even half the average cost of licensed care for their children. The Liberal Party plan does not appear to include a capital funding strategy to address the repair needs of the aging child care infrastructure or to finance the development of new child care centres in response to unmet care needs. While the Liberal Party plan does support a closer child care/education affiliation, it is silent on the care needs of school-aged children.

The New Democratic Party platform, entitled “Publicpower”, makes licensed child care more affordable by reducing parental fees to \$10.00 per day for children aged 18 months to 5 years who are currently enrolled in non-profit regulated child care and provides assurance that full subsidies for low-income families would be maintained. Under the New Democratic Party platform, the approximate 12,000 children who are currently enrolled in licensed child care operated for profit would not receive immediate relief with their child care expenses. The New Democratic Party does propose the creation of 20,000 new \$10.00 per day non-profit spaces, the inclusion of funding to maintain child care in the Education Funding formula, and the development of a child care centre in every school. Their plan is silent on publicly funded care for infants or school-aged children.

#### Proposed City Strategy for Child Care:

While there are elements in the announced platforms of both the provincial Liberals and New Democrats that are decidedly more supportive of the City’s child care system than the actions of the current provincial government, any major reform of the child care system will require significant time and money. As noted earlier, Toronto’s child care system cannot afford to wait. It is under severe financial stress and the service erosion has already begun. The City needs more immediate action. Rather than focusing on the endorsements of elements in either party platform, the City should instead seek all parties’ commitment to the following strategy to assist the child care system to stabilize and recover. Only then can child care in Toronto be well positioned for future reform. None of the proposals that follow restrict the ability of the present or any future provincial government to provide a better child care system for children, families and communities in Ontario. None of the following proposed actions require major legislative reform.

It is, therefore, recommended that the City of Toronto request all provincial parties, regardless of their long-term plan for child care, to publicly commit to the speedy implementation of the following plan which is vital to the survival of Toronto’s childcare system:

- (1) acknowledge the importance of quality licensed child care to the well-being of children, families and communities and include it as part of the provincial early years plan;
- (2) restore provincial child care funding that has been cut or eroded by inflation; in Toronto this means a minimum annual investment of \$18.6 million;
- (3) commit to ongoing annual funding increases for child care that match the rate of inflation;
- (4) restore provincial capital funding for the development of new licensed child care spaces;
- (5) provide an annual funding allocation for health and safety related improvements in child care;
- (6) eliminate the treatment of funds received by students under the Ontario Student Assistance Program, (OSAP) as income for the purposes of user fee determination. This practice unfairly penalizes parents who have to borrow money to pay child care user fees;

- (7) adjust the eligible hours of care policy to more realistically recognize study and travel time and to acknowledge the benefit to children of quality child care and the associated cost of disruption in the continuity of that care; and
- (8) exempt child care programs from the restrictions imposed by the current education funding formula.

Conclusions:

In anticipation of an upcoming provincial election, two of the three political parties have released their policy platforms for child care. This report outlines the key elements in these platforms but in the absence of more detail cannot provide a definitive analysis of the future implications for the City's child care system. What is clear, however, is that the City's child care system is currently in crisis because of inadequate provincial funding support. Before the City can support future child care reform, it is imperative that the existing child care system be stabilized, and restored. This report recommends an 8-point strategy to secure the immediate survival of Toronto's child care system and requests the public commitment of all three provincial parties to this strategy.

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List of Attachment:

Appendix 1 – Liberal and NDP Platforms

(A copy of the Appendix 1 referred to in the foregoing report was forwarded to all Members of Council with the agenda of the Community Services Committee for its meeting on June 9, 2003, and a copy thereof is on file in the office of the City Clerk, City Hall.)

The Community Services Committee also submits the following communication (May 30, 2003) from the City Clerk:

Recommendation:

The Children and Youth Action Committee on May 27, 2003, during consideration of the report (May 15, 2003) addressed to the Community Services Committee from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services, headed "The Child Care Policy Platforms of the Three Provincial Political Parties and Their Implications for Toronto's Child Care System", recommended that:

- (1) the report of the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services be adopted; and

- (2) a high-profile campaign to press for the direct flow-through of Federal funds for child care be approved.

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The following persons appeared before the Community Services Committee in connection with the foregoing matter:

- Ms. Leona Dombrowsky, MPP, Liberal Critic for Community, Family and Children's Services;
- Ms. Shelley Martel, MPP, NDP Children's Issues Critic, and submitted material in regard thereto;
- Ms. Sharon Filger, Chair, Child Care Advisory Committee;
- Ms. Alejandra Bravo, Chair of the Davenport School/Parent Council;
- Ms. Jane Mercer, Toronto Coalition for Better Child Care, and submitted a brief in regard thereto;
- Mr. Colin Hughes, Toronto Campaign 2000, and submitted a brief in regard thereto;
- Ms. Carol Smith, on behalf of Not Your Average Daycare, and submitted a brief in regard thereto;
- Ms. Fiona Nelson, Children and Youth Action Committee; and
- Ms. Janet Davis.