

Local Framework for Involvement in Federal and Provincial Investment Discussions Concerning an Early Childhood Development Program

(City Council on November 23, 24 and 25, 1999, adopted this Clause, without amendment.)

The Community Services Committee recommends that Mayor of the City of Toronto be requested to meet with the Premier of Ontario and the Minister of Community and Social Services to relay the message that the City of Toronto is experiencing a total crisis situation with respect to its provision of services to young children.

The Community Services Committee submits the following report (October 21, 1999) from the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services:

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to provide background information and a framework for local involvement with respect to federal and provincial discussions on investment in an early childhood development program. This information will assist members of Council interested in advancing this City's children's agenda with the provincial and federal governments.

Funding Sources, Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no direct financial implications for the City as a result of this report.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

Council Reference/Background/History:

At its September 9, 1999, meeting, the Community Services Committee received a communication from Councillor Olivia Chow regarding federal and provincial investments in an early childhood development program. The Committee requested that the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services provide background information on a framework whereby members of Council might influence these federal and provincial discussions. This report has been prepared in response to that request.

Comments and/or Discussion and/or Justification:

Recent developments at both the federal and provincial levels of government provide the City with opportunities to influence discussions concerning investment in early childhood development. The City's progress with respect to its own Agenda for Children can be used to advantage in this regard.

On October 7, 1999, the provincial government announced five demonstration projects to test and develop approaches which support good early learning and parenting. This announcement was made in response to the provincially commissioned McCain/Mustard report, entitled the "Early Years Study". Although Toronto was not listed as a provincial test site, Council has approved a seamless day pilot project initiative, which is currently being planned in co-operation with the Atkinson Foundation and the Boards of Education. Both the City initiative and the Provincial Demonstration Pilots flow from the findings and recommendations of the "Early Years Study". Both support the concept of a comprehensive system of early childhood development. This approach is further supported by another research paper commissioned by Toronto's Children and Youth Action Committee. A copy of this paper by Dr. Irene Kyle, entitled "Towards a Framework for Integrating Early Childhood Development and Family Support Programs," is also on this Committee agenda.

The Premier has also signaled that the October 21, 1999, Speech from the Throne will further demonstrate his government's commitment to children. The City hopes that this will provide the basis for a provincial response to the recent findings of the Operational Review of Ontario Works and Child Care in Toronto by KPMG Consulting which concluded that child care is critical to the success of Ontario Works but that there is insufficient child care to meet the current service demands in Toronto.

The Federal Throne Speech was delivered on October 12, 1999. The cornerstone of this address was support for children and families through increased parental leave, a greater investment in the National Children's Benefit and negotiation of a federal-provincial agreement on the National Children's Agenda. The need for a strong federal role to ensure national standards and adequate funding for an early childhood development program is supported by this Council. Toronto's Children's Charter clearly articulates the conviction that children are entitled to participate in high quality child care/early education programs if their parents so choose. This Council through decisions taken at its July 1999 meeting, urged the federal government to commit itself to a five-year investment plan to address child poverty and to promote the well-being of children through clear federal objectives and targets. Council also urged the federal government to use national infrastructure funds to support the development of public systems of early childhood development.

Toronto's Children and Youth Action Committee is sponsoring two initiatives to focus on the need for the federal government, in its millennium budget, to invest in an early childhood development program. A round table on the National Children's Agenda will be held on November 10, 1999, and an Urban Summit on Children's Issues is planned for January 2000. Both of these upcoming City events provide an opportunity for continuing involvement by Members of Council

Conclusions:

There is a convergence of interest and a growing acknowledgement by senior levels of government in the importance of investing in children. Toronto Council has adopted a number of strong positions calling on the federal and provincial levels of government to support children and families especially in the critical early years. Council members are well armed with the comprehensive information about the current state of children in this community outlined in the recently released "Toronto Report Card on Children, 1999," which is also on this Committee

agenda. The upcoming initiatives being organized by the Children and Youth Action Committee provide members of Council with continuing opportunities to advance this Council's positions in support of young children and families.

Contact Name:

Cheryl MacDonald

Tel: 392-9399/Fax: 392-4576

(Councillor Pantalone, at the Council meeting held on November 23, 24 and 25, 1999, declared his interest in the foregoing Clause, in that one of his children is registered in a day care centre which has a purchase of service agreement with the City of Toronto.)