

Deputation to Audit Committee
on
Auditor's Recommendation on City Child Care Centres
Friday, May 11, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Peter Clutterbuck. I am the Interim Executive Director with Social Planning Toronto, a nonprofit organization that works to improve the quality of life of Toronto residents.

Regarding the Auditor General's report, we have several major concerns. First, we strongly advise against recommendation #1 to examine options for contracting out the 52 City-run child care centres.

City-run child care centres are a small but essential part of the child care service delivery mix in Toronto. These centres provide critically important support to families in the city's most vulnerable communities. They operate in areas of the city where other child care providers would face significant barriers to establishing centres. Subsidies are provided for 93% of the children in these spaces including 120 children with special needs, which is about 10% of the children with special needs receiving child care support funding in Toronto. When

we talk about city-run child care, we're talking about vulnerable families and children with complex needs.

These centres provide high quality service and are deeply valued in the community. City-run centres will not turn any families away, especially those with children with complex needs, while this is not the case for all nonprofit child care centres. Nonprofit providers are often not adequately resourced to deliver the level of support required for children with special needs.

City-run child care centres are also an essential part of the child care delivery mix because they have the full financial backing of the City of Toronto. For other providers with limited resources, there are financial risks. This is especially problematic when vulnerable families with few to no other options for child care services are affected.

A second major concern is with respect to the loss of good jobs. *IF* there are any cost savings from contracting out these centres, these savings will be realized by eliminating hundreds of good jobs with decent wages and benefits that are largely held by WOMEN and replacing these jobs with considerably lower waged positions and jobs that may or may not have benefits in centres where work may be more precarious. This is a deeply misguided plan.

Decent wages and working conditions in City-run centres provide the benchmark for other providers to strive toward. We need the City to safeguard good child care jobs in the sector, not to eliminate them, and for all orders of government to resource the sector to raise wages to an acceptable standard.

Eliminating good jobs in the child care sector is counter to the City's child care plan that recognizes the need for a thriving workforce. It also runs counter to the City's poverty reduction strategy that recognizes the importance of quality jobs and livable incomes. The Auditor General's report suggests that through the permanent elimination of over 600 good jobs in the child care sector, the City could provide a small one-time increase to child care workers' wages. That's not the way to improve wages in the sector.

And finally, with respect to recommendations for stricter administrative and monitoring mechanisms pertaining to child care fee subsidies. The city has accountability systems in place now. If these systems become too onerous for low-income families to navigate, these families will lose their child care and then be unable to work or attend school, undermining one of the key purposes of providing child care, and moving the city in the opposite direction to which we should be headed. So-called accountability systems can also be more costly to

administer than the savings realized. We also note that the City, in its 10-year child care growth strategy, is planning to move toward a child care system that is more accessible, closer to a system of universality. Given that direction, it doesn't make sense to spend time and resources to build a system that is actually more restrictive and creates greater barriers to affordable child care access.

To conclude, I know that the audit function in the City is to "get value for money". But, we believe that it is also the City's responsibility to "give value for money". We support teachers in our public school system with good wages and benefits because they are preparing our children for productive, contributing futures. It is at least as important that our pre-school children thrive in safe, caring, stimulating early years environments. And essential that the City continue to play a direct role in the child care system that provides that value to Toronto's children and families.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

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