



December 14th, 2021

To the City Clerk:

Please add our comments to the agenda for the December 15, 2021 City Council meeting on item 2021.DM38.1, Affordable and Accessible Childcare for All - Update on Federal-Provincial Negotiations - by Councillor Joe Cressy, seconded by Councillor Michael Thompson.

We are Annabel Gomizelj, Tegan Nguyen and Lisa Johnston, writing on behalf of Early Years Professionals Rise up T.O., a collective of over 100 advocates for the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) sector in the city of Toronto. Our members, many of whom are also parents, include Registered Early Childhood Educators, centre supervisors, students, faculty, researchers and other early years professionals. We work in diverse settings throughout the city, providing critical early learning and care for young children and their families.

It is a long-standing assumption, based on a gendered notion of care, that early years professionals enter the sector because they love children and are therefore expected to sacrifice their financial stability and wellbeing. The current inequitable provision of care, through a patchwork of non-profit, public and for-profit centres, leaves Toronto families struggling to find affordable, quality care for their children. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the ELCC workforce has continued to work with an unmasked and unvaccinated population, leaving themselves and their families vulnerable. Despite access to child care being recognized as essential for the reopening of the economy, this was not reflected in the treatment of the workforce - they were denied pandemic pay and were forced to fight for priority access to vaccines.

The announcement of the 2021 Federal Budget brought a glimmer of much needed hope to the overworked and undervalued workforce. For five long months we have watched as agreements

have been signed by every other province. The workforce is still waiting for improved working conditions and increased wages, and families are waiting for affordable fees and increased access to quality child care spaces.

We have not been waiting in silence, fighting to amplify the voices of the workforce and the children and families we serve. These voices have been completely ignored by the province, who continues to drag its heels using stall tactics. This unacceptable delay is causing even more damage to an already fragile sector.

As an advocacy group, we are hearing from our members and other early years professionals in the city about the myriad of complex challenges they are facing. Challenges such as:

- ECEs who are leaving the sector because they are burned out from the unsustainable workload and lack of decent working conditions (including paid sick days) that have only been exacerbated by the pressures of the pandemic;
- Programs which are unable to hire and retain qualified staff;
- Children who are struggling to build stable, meaningful relationships with their educators due to staff turnover;
- ECE graduates who are discouraged from entering the sector knowing that low ECE wages are not sufficient to repay student loans in addition to the basic costs of living;
- Families who are struggling to find child care, as many centres have reduced capacity due to staffing shortages;
- Families who are facing increasing fees, when fees in Toronto are already the highest in the country;
- Families who have lost jobs due to COVID also losing their subsidy, making it impossible to find new employment;
- People who are delaying starting a family due to lack of access to affordable child care;
- Child care centres closing, leaving families scrambling to find alternative care.

This is only a very brief glimpse into the state of crisis that the ELCC sector is currently in. The solution is clear : an agreement must be signed.

Signing the federal child care agreement would provide immediate relief for educators and families in Toronto by increasing wages, improving working conditions, and expanding access to affordable care. It will build the foundation of a system that focuses on non-profit and public

care, which has proven to be high quality and affordable, and provides decent work for educators. The work of early years professionals is critical to our collective flourishing as a society. It is important that they are respected for the vital work they do with young children and families.

We need the Mayor and City Council to negotiate with the Ontario government to get the federal child care agreement signed. Or, to seek out getting an agreement signed directly with the federal government. Our families and community are counting on you to advocate for our needs. We can't wait any longer.

We look forward to seeing the city take swift action to prioritize the children, families and the child care workforce in our community by getting the federal child care agreement signed.

Sincerely,

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