



DATE: October 22, 2024

TO: Chair and Members Economic and Community Development Committee

FROM: Toronto Child Care Advocates

RE: **EC 16.2 Sidewalks to Skylines: An Action Plan for Toronto's Economy 2025- 2035**

Toronto Child Care Advocates are dedicated to the development of a universally accessible, inclusive, high-quality, affordable, not-for-profit and public early learning and child care (ELCC) system for all Toronto. Our group includes child care advocacy organizations, unions, academics, parents and service providers.

First, we want to recognize the time and resources that have been committed to this important 10-year plan. The future economic vitality, livability and social inclusion in our City is a concern to us all.

While we acknowledge the comprehensive work undertaken in this report, we believe there are significant gaps, and more work needs to be undertaken to ensure that child care and other essential community services that will help build an inclusive economy, are included in the Action Plan.

We recommend that the report be referred back to staff, with a request to consider the submissions and deputations made at committee, and report to a future meeting of the Economic and Community Development Committee with any recommended changes to the Action Plan.

We also urge staff to undertake specific consultation with sectors, communities and experts that deliver or advocate for important social infrastructure in Toronto, such as child care, long term care, seniors services and home care, shelter services, community services and feminist organizations and experts on the "care economy."

Where is Early Learning and Child Care?

We are especially concerned that the Early Learning and Child Care sector, the organizations and people that provide these services - and those that benefit from them, have been excluded in the consultation process and Action Plan report and recommendations.

It seems inconceivable to us that equitable access to high-quality, affordable, early learning and child care for all families and communities does not appear as a foundational assumption and key component of the long-term economic strategy and the Action Plan for our City. In fact, there is absolutely no mention of child care services or Children's Services in the staff report and the 73 Actions for the 10 year plan.

The Action Plan and report identify City divisions and existing plans that should be considered in advancing the economic strategy; however, the Child Care Growth Strategy and other Children's Services foundational reports are not referenced, and Children's Services Division does not appear to be consulted or included in the collaborative work envisioned to build an "inclusive economic development" process. The report also recommends that this report be sent to most relevant provincial ministries but does not include the Ministry of Education which has responsibility for early learning and child care.

Early Learning and Child Care Has Important Economic and Social Benefits

The City of Toronto has long recognized that early learning and child care:

- Is an economic driver and an investment in people, a skilled workforce and good jobs
- Increases labour force participation, particularly for women and other equity-deserving groups and communities
- Improves child development outcomes and future success in school
- Supports integration and settlement of newcomer families
- Improves access to economic opportunities in low-income, priority neighbourhoods

Although the City has strong policy on the positive impacts of early learning and child care, a service plan that targets inequitable service levels across the city and communities, and recognizes that child care is fundamental to women's equality - there are no recommendations in the Action Plan to address the serious shortage of child care spaces, the child care workforce crisis and the lack of fee subsidies to address equitable access to spaces in low income and underserved communities.

What about the other critical sectors in the "care economy"?

We are concerned that emerging policy and advocacy around the inequities of the "care economy" are also overlooked. The care sector, both paid and unpaid, provides critical social infrastructure and employment opportunities that are as important to the economy as many other sectors, consulted and addressed in the consultants report and Action Plan (Building and Construction, Financial Services, Innovation and Tech, Life Sciences and Biomedical, Manufacturing, Media and Entertainment, Tourism).

Care work, both in the City's workforce and the economy generally, is gendered, racialized, overlooked and undervalued. Child care, long term care, home care, shelter services, housing and community services are fundamental services that provide direct and indirect economic benefits, ensure stability for the broader labour force and provide pathways to economic independence for women and others that have historically been excluded from paid work.

The care sector is significant, labour intensive and accounts for at least 21% of all paid labour.* These numbers do not include another crucial contribution to the economy, unpaid labour in care work.

Public investment in these critical sectors will provide many economic benefits, both direct and indirect, contribute to a more inclusive and equitable City, creating more good jobs and address workforce shortages. This kind of investment also contributes to ensuring that all communities share in the prosperity that the Action Plan strives to achieve.

The CUI report:

Despite there being no explicit consultation with the child care sector, the CUI report said:

“Participants often noted the need for access to civic infrastructure to support participation in the economy, the most common example being childcare. We heard the desire to see greater investment in, advocating for, and co-locating of community services such as in libraries. Community services were routinely noted as important factors in making the return to office and workforce participation easier.”

The CUI report also identified “*Champion Quality of Life as a Competitive Advantage*” and “*Building an Inclusive Economy*” as two of six key Opportunities for the City. The report highlighted

“Quality of life is a cross cutting, all-encompassing matter that impacts Toronto’s ability to attract and retain talent, investment, and create an inclusive city that can compete with other metropolitan areas. Accordingly, there is a substantial need for Toronto to champion quality of life matters including housing, mobility, safety, and investment in community assets.”

The report recommended that the City should “*Engage with communities consistently and identify approaches to realize an inclusive economy.*” “*There is substantial opportunity for Toronto to co-develop a shared vision and approach for inclusive economic development in Toronto by working closely with its communities and bringing in public and institutional partnerships.*”

The Action Plan and Report Recommendations: 29 Leading Actions

We are very disappointed with the absence of any explicit recommendations with respect to Early Learning and Child Care. We believe the City must acknowledge that investment in ELCC is critical and necessary for families, woman, children, equity-deserving communities -- and fundamental to building a strong, inclusive economy for Toronto. We believe that investments in ELCC, and other community services, is essential for building the economic and social infrastructure for a successful city – and for achieving the “quality of life” that is central in the CUI report.

We have not specifically commented on all 73 recommendations; however, we would like to highlight two of the Action Plan recommendations that encompass ELCC and other sectors that provide critical community and support services:

Action Plan Recommendation 1 : “Achieve a new long-term intergovernmental funding deal for Toronto.” We strongly support this recommendation and recognize a complete “new deal” is essential to correct the imbalance between the City responsibilities and its fiscal capacity and future sustainability.

As identified in the plan, a new, long term and sustained funding arrangement for both capital and operating funding is critical to building housing and transit infrastructure; however, it is also critical to building the child care system our city’s families need. While there is a significant new federal/provincial agreement for ELCC, the critical lack of capital funding for child care infrastructure expansion and adequate operating investment to address the poor wages and staffing crisis in the ELCC workforce is still not addressed. The inadequate funding will prevent the desperately needed expansion of child care services, for families, women, children and communities, and prevent the economic opportunities that high-quality, not-for-profit/public child care offers.

Action Plan Recommendations 4 and 5: *Embed inclusivity into Toronto’s future economic development work* and “develop an Inclusive Economic Development (IED) Framework for adoption.” This process should include an open and accessible process that includes the child care sector and other civil society organizations and affected communities. As well, the City must continue a co-led approach to developing an Indigenous Economic Strategy.

However, the report appears to leave this work out of Action Plan and accompanying budget. Without a clear process for how the IED Framework and consultation processes will be integrated with the Action Plan, we worry this important work will become a marginal, parallel and unfunded project.

EC 16.2 Staff Recommendations

We believe it is premature to approve the staff recommendations before the Committee. The Action Plan does not recognize the critical role of child care and other important community services that contribute to the quality of life and build equitable and inclusive city we all strive for.

We recommend the report be referred back to staff, with a request for them to consider the submissions and deputations made at committee; and report to the November 26 meeting of the Economic and Community Development Committee with any recommended changes.

We also urge staff to undertake specific consultation with sectors, communities and experts that deliver or advocate for important social infrastructure in Toronto, such as child care, long term care, seniors services and home care, shelter services, community services and feminist organizations and experts.

Sincerely,

Donna Spreitzer, Executive Director, Toronto Community for Better Child Care

On behalf of Toronto Child Care Advocates

