



COALITION OF

child care advocates

OF BC



Working together for a community based, non-profit child care system that is high quality, affordable, accessible, publicly funded and accountable.

Honourable Mary McNeil
Minister of Children and Family Development
Room 306
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

May 3rd, 2012

Dear Minister McNeil,

The purpose of this letter is to request that the Ministry of Children and Families immediately implement a moratorium on new approvals of Child Care Operating Funds (CCOF) for commercial child care chains operating in BC. This moratorium is required in order to put “families at the forefront” of decision-making, as committed under your government’s “Families First Agenda for Change” (MCFD 2012).

The prime duty of a commercial child care chain is to maximize the return on investment. We have repeatedly brought concerns to your government’s attention about the implications of this business model for child care, including increased parent fees, low quality and/or increased demand for public subsidies to generate private profits. In the past, our concerns were based on research and evidence from other jurisdictions. Today, they reflect a reality in BC.

Child care services in BC have two main sources of revenue, parent fees and CCOF. With respect to parent fees, the amount of money that families with young children have to spend on child care is finite and the cost of child care is already prohibitive for many. Yet one of the commercial child care chains operating in BC recently dealt with their desire to achieve profit targets by initiating an unconscionable increase to the parent fee.

As you must know, the commercial child care chain Kids and Company recently announced that their Vancouver fees for children under three years of age would be increasing from \$1,550/month to \$1,915/per month, an increase of 24% or \$365/month. It should be noted that even at \$1,550/ month this program was already at the pinnacle of the 2011 fee range for this age group in Vancouver: the median monthly fee for toddlers is \$1,155 (Westcoast Fee Surveys, 2011).

The fees announced by Kids and Company for new enrolling toddlers – almost \$23,000 annually - are beyond the reach of most BC families. Even the few families that are eligible for the maximum toddler provincial fee subsidy of \$7,620 annually would still have to pay \$15,360 (\$22,980 – \$7,620) to participate in this program.

Commercial child care chains that are prepared to charge such exorbitant parent fees should not receive additional public funding through CCOF. MCFD does not provide funding to other services for young children with similar profit motives built in to their service delivery models. In fact, other early childhood development programs are run by non-profit organizations. Similarly, the K-12 system, even where it is privately run (i.e. independent schools) is in the hands of non-profit societies.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development 2012–2013 Service Plan commits your ministry “to explore strategies and policy options to improve access and affordability of child care.”

The moratorium that we propose is entirely appropriate while you undertake this commitment.

Please note that British Columbia has always had private operators who provide child care as a small business. Typically, these operators are individual Early Childhood Educators who, in the absence of other options, operate and often work in their own child care programs. The moratorium we are proposing is NOT directed at them.

Minister, in your Service Plan Accountability Statement, you explain that the “Families First Agenda for Change” means “really getting at the heart of what families need from their government.” As growing endorsements confirm, families need their government to implement the Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care & Learning. The Plan provides a concrete, logical and ‘made-in-BC’ model for building a child care system in our province that puts the needs of children, families, educators, and communities first.

We are convinced that upon review you will agree with the municipalities, boards of education, community organizations, businesses, academics and over a thousand individuals from every corner of the province that the Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning is the solution to the current child care crisis!

In the meantime please, as a first step, immediately implement a moratorium on granting CCOF funds to new requests from commercial child care chains. We respectfully suggest that the Child Care Forum being planned by your Ministry for May 24th might be the perfect opportunity to announce this decision.

Thank you. We look forward to your prompt response, prior to us sharing this letter with our members and supporters on May 8th, 2012.

Sincerely,



Chairperson
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

cc. Deputy Minister Stephen Brown