

Brief to the Special Parliamentary
Committee on Childcare

presented by:

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We are pleased to have the opportunity to appear before the Special Parliamentary Committee on Childcare to express our concerns and share our ideas about the delivery of childcare.

It is a critically important time to be discussing childcare. User fees are rising, the demand for quality, accessible childcare is accelerating and there is also an immediate need to address the issue of a decent living wage for daycare workers. We are glad that the Committee is studying the entire structure and delivery of childcare. It is essential that any discussion of reform, include discussion of a revamping of the system of childcare delivery, so that it more directly meets the needs of working people. Affordability, accessibility and quality are the key words in these reforms.

The Ontario Federation of Labour represents almost 800,000 workers in Ontario. We have a long and proud history in the struggle for quality childcare. We have negotiated clauses on childcare and parental rights in our workplaces. We have lobbied the Ontario Government for changes and improvements in the delivery of childcare and we played a key role in the formation of the Ontario Coalition for Better Daycare. Within our own house of labour we have set an example with the universal provision of childcare or childcare subsidies at all OFL conventions, conferences, schools and educational institutions. Childcare is a critical issue for all workers, not just parents. We are first and foremost here today to stress that fact. We believe in a

universally accessible, quality childcare system, and just as with medicare and pension protection we believe it should be federally mandated, universally available, well funded and sensitive to those who need the service.

In this presentation to the Committee, we will give a few thoughts on how best this can be accomplished. We would also submit to the committee that we fully support the representation and brief by the Ontario Coalition that you have heard this morning.

A New System of Delivery

We would like to stress to the Committee the urgent need to restructure the financing of childcare in order to make high quality child care programs accessible to all Canadian families. Equally important is the immediate need to provide fair wages for childcare program staff. The time has come for all levels of Government to move beyond childcare as a welfare service, and to recognize and implement a truly universal service from which all families in Canada will have the opportunity to benefit.

During the last decade, there has been a dramatic increase in the demand for daycare. The participation of women in the workforce at all economic levels has risen, yet the demand for childcare has not been met with adequate amounts of service. In

addition, the existing funding mechanisms which limit financial support to subsidies for low-income families, are totally inadequate.

The Federal Government has been slow to make policy changes to reflect the changing needs of working families. The Ontario Government in contrast has made some piecemeal attempts to address the need through incentives to expand the availability of licensed groups care, promotion of regulated private home care and support of informal care. Capital and start-up dollars have been targeted, first to municipalities, then to non-profit daycare centres, regulated private home care and resource centre programs.

These are first steps, but the demand for childcare across Ontario continues to race ahead of spaces available. The issue of affordability becomes increasingly important as childcare user fees are too high and parents are forced to use unregulated informal childcare, or to pay user fees which cut substantially into their family income. Accessibility to childcare has therefore become an issue which requires a substantial change in policy and a major restructuring of the funding mechanisms.

Historically, Governments have supported the notion that the

free market can best supply day care to meet parents needs at an affordable price with adequate quality, subject to provincial regulations and standards. It is clearly no longer a valid notion.

Clearly the funding of an essential social service should not be left to the hands of the market system. Childcare should be universally delivered. It is as vital to the educational development of our children as the public school system. Such a restructuring of the system would also ensure a systematic attack on the fragmentation in planning and delivery of childcare services that has occurred over the past several decades.

The Ontario Federation of Labour joins with, and very much supports the growing community of parents, teachers, daycare workers and local unions who are working for a fairly fundamental reorientation of the system. We stress again the key words are universally accessible, affordable and quality.

Childcare Models:

In the Ontario Federation of Labour's work with our membership we have come to understand the need for neighbourhood based delivery of childcare services. We represent sole support mothers, two income families, shift workers and part-time

workers. The models of childcare must reflect the real needs of working parents. Key elements in such a model include:

- licensed group childcare centres with flexible hours
- licensed family childcare offering flexible hours and overnight care with caregivers employed by the centre and paid on the same basis as other employees at the the centre
- school-age programs to accommodate children needing morning care, lunch time programs, afternoon, and school holidays
- overnight care in the child's own home for parents who work on awkward or rotating shifts and have transportation difficulties.
- emergency care for parents who are suddenly sick, confined to hospital or experience a crisis, and for children who are too sick to be with other children or who are convalescing from a long sickness
- workplace day care at centres near to the workplace to accommodate parents who prefer childcare near their place of work, especially infants of nursing mothers

- parent resource and information centre/parent education programs, parent/child drop-in centres, counselling services for parents, toy exchanges/books/clothes/equipment

The majority of these services could be established in the community neighbourhood. Some would be located to accommodate parents who prefer child care options in close proximity to their workplace, particularly for infants and young children. Obviously, safety and health questions would need to be considered. Employers should NOT control a vital service needed by workers.

Currently childcare in Ontario is not a funded program like health care or education. Rather it is a fee-paying service which is a parental responsibility. Fees for daycare are calculated on the basis of costs and the average Ontario fee in 1984 was \$4,000 per annum.

In order to survive, daycare centres in Ontario must rely on parent fees for survival and must conform to high provincial standards and regulations in order to ensure quality programs. Most daycare centres, then, attempt to run good quality programs at the lowest possible cost. For a parent with an infant, or more than one child, day care costs in Ontario are prohibitively high.

Salaries and wages ordinarily comprise about 80% or more of a daycare centres budget so that keeping staff salaries low is the only way to cut costs. In 1984, the provincial average salary for a daycare worker was \$13,000.00.

Private home caregivers earn even less. They receive an average of \$12 per day for a preschool child. For this amount they are expected to care for the child for perhaps eleven hours, provide food, toys and outings.

Increased Accessibility

The supply of childcare for all ages is uneven across the province but infants and school age children are underserved everywhere. Children between the ages of 10 and 12 are not accommodated in daycare unless special exceptions are made. Yet parents are legally obliged to ensure there is sufficient care for them up to age 12. Despite the fact that a majority of women with children under 3 are in the labour force, infant care is non-existent in many communities.

Daycare Spaces (Ontario)

September, 1985

Infants	7,051
Preschool Children	48,829
Kindergarten	25,159

Schoolage Children	6,927
TOTAL	87,966

In addition, there is very uneven distribution of day care services across the province. Some municipalities have only 12 day care spaces, whereas others have 10,000. Some municipalities have no care for infants, some have no private home day care services. Some municipalities spend very little on daycare, some spend a lot. And even within municipalities, programs are often located in places which are difficult for parents, particularly those who must rely on public transportation.

These remarks briefly lay out our position on the existing childcare system and the need for massive reform. We append key documents produced by the Ontario Federation of Labour, which reflect more extensively our position.

In concluding, we would like to make several very specific recommendations:

1. That the Federal Government begin negotiations with the provinces and territories to introduce a comprehensive system of universally accessible, quality child care services and parental leave, such a system to be of high quality, non-profit, publicly-funded and non-compulsory.

2. That such initiatives take into account the Neighbourhood Resource Centre as a planning model and would include a variety of services, including group daycare, family home daycare, parent resource centres, in-home care, part-time care, emergency care extended hours for shiftworkers, toy-lending libraries, children's drop-in programs, etc.

3. That in the short-term, the Federal Government initiate new cost-sharing arrangements to directly fund day care programs at the rate of:
 - \$8 per child per day for each space serving an infant, a disabled or a special needs child;
 - \$4 per day for each full-day space serving preschool children and school age children when school is not in session; and,
 - \$3 per day for each after-school and half-day preschool space.

4. That the Federal Government develop a new capital cost program including:
 - (a) \$500 per space for children under 6; \$300 for school-age children and \$200 for family home day care;

(b) 20% of costs of handicapped spaces;

(c) cost-sharing full start-up costs

5. That the Federal Government will take initiatives to set up and provide operating grants to child care centres and programs for Federal Government workers.
6. That the Federal Government ensure that provision for parental leave be strengthened through UIC by increasing benefits, extending lengths of leaves, and reducing qualifying periods.
7. That childcare funding be restructured to recognize the valuable work performed by childcare workers, and to ensure money in the system to raise wages to a decent living standard and to ensure the provision of benefits for childcare workers.