



**BILL C-144:
A CRITIQUE OF THE PROPOSED
CANADA CHILD CARE ACT**

The Canada Child Care Act, Bill C-144, introduced in the House of Commons in August 1988, will be a major step backwards for children and families in Canada. The Child Care Act, Bill C-144, has been presented by the federal government as a way of providing choices for parents which will enhance their chances of accessing the child care they need and as a step towards social and economic equality for women.

It is neither of these things. Nor can it serve as a foundation for the development of a child care system. The Canada Child Care Act is a profoundly flawed scheme which is not in the best interests of children, families or women in Canada.

THE PROPOSED CANADA CHILD CARE ACT: Bill C-144.

1. LACKS NATIONAL OBJECTIVES

National objectives and federal criteria for provincial participation in cost-sharing are essential features of other effective national social programs in Canada. Federal leadership in establishing criteria for the quality of and accessibility to child care services is critical. Without the inclusion of strong guiding principles setting out a long-term vision for a national child care system, Bill C-144 will entrench the current fragmented approach to child care in Canada.

2. LACKS VISION IN OFFERING CHILD CARE CHOICES

The Canada Child Care Act, Bill C-144, fails to recognize or support the diversity of needs for high quality child care across the country. Although provinces may choose to offer a variety of child care services (for example, regulated family day care, infant care, school-age care, care for ill children, nursery school, programs to accommodate special needs children, extended hours care and parent-child centres) there is no assurance that those will become available to parents across the country nor is there sufficient funding to allow them to develop broadly. In addition, Bill C-144 omits recognition of the unique considerations of native Canadians regarding child care.

3. INTRODUCES NEW FUNDING RESTRICTIONS

The Canada Child Care Act, Bill C-144, introduces new ceilings on child care spending. Provinces which replace the open-ended cost-sharing of the Canada Assistance Plan with participation in the new Child Care Act will be moving from an open-ended mechanism to a limited fund. The \$4 billion fund currently allotted as the maximum federal contribution over the next seven years is not assured, as actual expenditures are subject to annual appropriation by Parliament. This is expected to accommodate all child care needs including operational grants and subsidies for low income families, now guaranteed to the provinces through CAP, and new capital spending.

4. ABANDONS TRADITIONAL FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR LOW INCOME CANADIANS

The Canada Child Care Act, Bill C-144, fails to guarantee that even current levels of financial assistance available under the Canada Assistance Plan to help low income families meet their child care needs will remain in place, let alone be enhanced.

5. RESTRICTS CHILD CARE GROWTH

The Canada Child Care Act, Bill C-144, has targeted an increase of only 200,000 new child care spaces in Canada over the next seven years leaving out at least 3 of 4 children who need non-parental supplementary care on a regular basis. Estimated natural growth under the current arrangements would create more than 300,000 new spaces by 1995.

In addition, Bill C-144 does not provide federal support of capital costs after 1995, curtailing continued development of needed child care.

6. ENTRENCHES POOR QUALITY CARE

The Canada Child Care Act, Bill C-144, undermines the development of high quality child care by extending federal funding to commercial child care services. New public funding to for-profit child care will lead to rapid growth, including expansion by large American chains with substantial venture capital and the ability to move quickly into new markets. There is good evidence that the quality of commercial care is poorer than the quality of child care in the non-profit sector in important areas like staff:child ratios, staff training, staff turnover, health and safety, and wages and working conditions for staff. Also, there is no opportunity for significant parental involvement in the program and the decision making in commercial centers.

Bill C-144 fails to ensure that provinces will support existing or new non-profit services with direct operating funds. Without direct operating funds, not only will high fees make child care inaccessible for families but salaries for child care staff will remain low. Services will continue to be plagued with existing financial problems and the high quality care children need will remain out of reach.

7. PROVIDES DISINCENTIVES TO "HAVE-NOT" PROVINCES

The Canada Child Care Act, Bill C-144, undermines the incentive for "have-not" provinces to significantly increase child care services due to rapid phasing-out of needed variable cost-sharing.

8. OFFERS LITTLE PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY FOR FUNDING OR SERVICES

The Canada Child Care Act, Bill C-144, provides only minimal provision for public accountability for public funds or for monitoring and enforcement of minimum provincial standards as well as moving away from accountability for service delivery by parents by entrenching the expansion of commercial child care.

9. OFFERS NO PARENTAL LEAVE PROVISIONS

The Canada Child Care Act, Bill C-144, is unaccompanied by any legislation dealing with enhanced maternity leave, parental leave, or family responsibility leave, all major aspects of a comprehensive national child care plan.

Finally, the federal government itself acknowledges the major weaknesses in The Canada Child Care Act by allowing individual provinces to opt out of the new program and continue instead to access the Canada Assistance Plan, clearly demonstrating that Bill C-144 can not act as the foundation for a child care system which will meet the needs of children, families and women across Canada.

Based on a brief by the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association to the Legislative Committee on Bill C-144. For copies of the brief, contact C.D.C.A.A., 323 Chapel St., Ottawa, K1N 7Z2 613-594-3196