

For immediate release

MODERNIZING CHILD CARE: AN OPEN LETTER TO ONTARIO'S MINISTER OF EDUCATION

September 13, 2012

Hon. Laurel Broten, Minister of Education
14th Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, ON M7A 1L2

Email: lbroten.mpp@liberal.ola.org

Dear Minister Broten:

Thank you for your call of June 27, 2012 asking for public feedback on *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario*.¹ The Institute of Marriage and Family Canada welcomes the opportunity to respond before the September 24, 2012 deadline and is encouraging parents to write their own letters before this date.

We would like to express two basic concerns with *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario*:

- 1) The report is not centred on what is best for children
- 2) The report is not centred on what is best for families, more specifically, parents.

In short, the Government of Ontario is pursuing family policies that do not benefit families, particularly when contrasted to policies that could offer substantial aid, like tax credits for parents to increase their cash flow.

Modernizing Child Care in Ontario starts by looking at care outside the home. In fact, you clarify that *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario* "focuses on the child care that children receive when they are not in the care of their families." However, the very essence of child care *is* parents and families.

It is parents who want to be able to make choices about childcare. Governments must grant parents the power and capacity to make choices that work for their families. In the best scenario, governments would not be involved in what is decidedly not government business: how we care for our children.

Parents do not choose institutional daycare as their first, second or even third choice. An Institute of Marriage and Family Canada poll published in 2006 and a Compass poll conducted in 2003 found a

majority of parents prefer that a relative care for their children if they are unable to stay home. Seventy-seven per cent thought it was better for children if a parent stayed home, including 83.9 per cent of families with annual income below \$30,000.²

Funding for institutional, centre-based daycare does not reflect a diversity of parental desires. Neither is it an equitable pursuit. The Ontario Government should represent all parents, even those who do not use centre-based care.

By 2012-13, the province boasts that the funding for child care will rise to more than \$1 billion. This is a huge sum of money—and even so it is not enough to provide quality childcare for Ontario’s children below the age of four. It is worth noting that care for children below the age of four is much more expensive than care for older children. When the IMFC quantified the real cost of all-day kindergarten for four and five-year-olds, \$1.5 billion annually was the minimum estimate. Were parents given the money instead, this would amount to an astounding \$9,199 dollars *per child* annually.³ A *mere fraction* of that amount would be extremely helpful to parents, who, with money in pocket, could choose the type of care that is best for their children themselves.

Parents are struggling with finances, this much is true, and creating a higher and higher tax burden through increased social spending as Ontario’s economy declines is one way to drive them into the ground.⁴ For every dollar spent, these are dollars the government cannot spend elsewhere. Government daycare programs are achieved on the backs of parents across the province, and at a cost to every Ontario taxpayer, while the majority of parents do not prefer and did not ask for this type of child care.

The bigger problem is that research does not show that “early learning and care” in centre-based environments is beneficial.⁵ In some cases, research shows children to be worse off in centre-based care.⁶ The province has consistently chosen to ignore peer-reviewed research suggesting that children do not benefit from the provision of “early learning and care” in institutional environments. The Government of Ontario consistently relies only on one side of the research equation, often distorting other research results as well.

The best example of highly distorted research is the Government’s use of the Ypsilanti-based Perry Preschool Project. Charles Pascal cited this study in writing his special report to Premier Dalton McGuinty in 2009. He wrote that it “calculates \$17 savings on health, justice and social welfare savings for every \$1 spent on the program.”⁷

To say this study has been taken completely out of context is being kind. There were only 58 children in the Perry Preschool Project, they all came from a high crime, urban inner-city context and were required to have low IQs. Mothers participated in the program and teachers did home visits. Finally, the children only spent 2.5 hours per day in a classroom setting and the child to teacher ratio was five or six to one. The study was never repeated, and there is absolutely no reason to believe the results would ever be replicated on a larger-scale.⁸

Dr. Gordon Neufeld, the Vancouver-based developmental psychologist, recently commented that it is better for children to go to school at a later age, not earlier. When asked what the gains from early learning for small children are, Dr. Neufeld simply said: “I don’t think there is anything to be gained except parental emancipation. And certainly not parental fulfillment. That’s a totally different issue.”⁹

The Institute of Marriage and Family Canada believes that your hope to “modernize child care” will actually impoverish the parents of the beautiful province of Ontario, with little evidence of any benefit for our children.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue with you further and challenge you to reconsider your current approach. Let’s work toward getting the government out of the childcare business, instead giving more power to parents.

Sincerely,



Andrea Mrozek

Manager of Research and Communications, Institute of Marriage and Family Canada

Cc: Child Care Modernization
c/o Early Learning Division
Ministry of Education
24th floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay St.
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2
CCGE_modernization@ontario.ca

Gary Wheeler, Communications Branch, gary.s.wheeler@ontario.ca

Graham Rivers, Minister’s Office, Grahame.rivers@ontario.ca

Members of Provincial Parliament

For additional information or comment, please contact: Andrea Mrozek, Manager of Research and Communications at 613-565-3832, ext. 7502.

Endnotes

-
- ¹ Early Learning Division: Child Care Modernization. (June 2012). Modernizing child care in Ontario: Sharing conversations, strengthening partnerships, working together. Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/Modernizing_Child_Care.pdf
- ² See Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. (2006). Canadians make choices on childcare. *Canadian Family Views*. Retrieved from <http://www.imfcanada.org/sites/default/files/canadiansmakechoicesaboutchildcare.pdf> and COMPAS Inc. Public Opinion and Customer Research. (2003). Ontario provincial election report for Global TV, *National Post*, *Ottawa Citizen* and *Windsor Star*, Table 17, Q 12. Retrieved from <http://www.compas.ca/data/030521-GlobalOnProvElection-E.pdf>
- ³ Mrozek, A., Walberg, R. (2009, November). The cost of a free lunch: The real costs of the Pascal early learning plan for Ontario. Ottawa: Institute of Marriage and Family Canada Retrieved from <http://www.imfcanada.org/issues/cost-free-lunch>
- ⁴ CBC News. (2012, April 26). Moody's downgrades Ontario credit rating. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/story/2012/04/26/toronto-ontario-deficit.html>
- ⁵ National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, Early Child Care Research Network. (2003). Does amount of time spent in child care predict socio-emotional adjustment during the transition to kindergarten? *Child Development*, Vol. 74, No. 4, pp. 969-1226.
- Watamura, S., Donzella, B., Alwin, J., Gunnar, M. (2003). Morning-to-afternoon increases in cortisol concentrations for infants and toddlers at child care: Age differences and behavioral correlates. *Child Development*, Vol 74, No. 4, pp. 1006-1020.
- Pagani, L., Larocque, D., Tremblay, R., Lapointe, P. (2003). The impact of junior kindergarten on behavior in elementary school children. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, Vol. 27, No. 5, pp. 423-427.
- Tremblay, R., Nagin, D. et al. (2004). Physical aggression during early childhood: Trajectories and predictors. *Pediatrics*, Vol. 114, No. 1. Retrieved online: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/reprint/114/1/e43>
- Borge, A., Rutter, M. et al. (2004). Early childcare and physical aggression: differentiating social selection and social causation. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Vol. 45, No. 2, p. 367-376.
- Belsky, J. et al. (2007). Are there long-term effects of early child care? *Child Development*, Vol. 78, No. 2, pp.681-701.
- Buckingham, J. (2007). Child care: Who benefits? The Center for Independent Studies, No. 89.
- Loeb, S., Bridges, M., Bassok, D., Fuller, B., Rumberger, R. (2007). How much is too much? The influence of preschool centers on children's social and cognitive development. *Economics of Education Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 52-66.
- National Institute of Child Health & Human Development. (2007, March 26). Early child care linked to increases in vocabulary, some problem behaviors in fifth and sixth grades. Press release. Retrieved from http://www.nichd.nih.gov/news/releases/child_care_linked_to_vocabulary_032607.cfm
- Leonhardt, D. (2006, June 14). The price of day care can be high, *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/14/business/14leonhardt.html?_r=3&adxnnl=1&oref=slogin&adxnnlx=1150331753-7qOzmmKjihKLBVYzflavDw&oref=slogin&oref=slogin
- ⁶ Milligan, K., Gruber, J. and Baker, M. (2008). Universal childcare, maternal labor supply and family well-being. *Journal of Political Economy*.
- ⁷ Pascal, C. (2009, June). With our best future in mind: Implementing early learning in Ontario. Report to the Premier by the special advisor on early learning. Ontario, Queen's Printer, p. 12.
- ⁸ Kids First Parent Association of Canada. (2010, March). Submission to the social policy committee of the Ontario government regarding Bill 242, pp. 17-18. Retrieved from <http://www.kidsfirstcanada.org/bill242submissionOnt.pdf>
- ⁹ Mrozek, A. (2012, August). Nurturing children: Why "early learning" doesn't help. Ottawa: Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.imfcanada.org/issues/nurturing-children-why-early-learning-does-not-help>