

Letter 20041029 Dryden Child Care

An Open Letter to Honourable Ken Dryden, Minister of Social Development, and the Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Child Care:

During the last federal election, the now-governing Liberal Party committed to introduce a 'Quebec-style' child care system across Canada. This was welcome news for Canada's children, and certainly long overdue. Canada's economy is strong, we continue to have a steady stream of budget surpluses, and we can well afford this important social initiative.

We expect you to enter into the November 1 and 2 meetings with the leadership, vision and commitment to bring home a pan-Canadian child care plan.

We represent a range of individuals, groups and organizations from coast to coast to coast working together to ensure that, this time, the federal election promise on child care is fulfilled. As you know, many of us have been advocating for over 20 years for a universal, publicly funded system that will provide all children in Canada with access to high quality early learning and child care experiences.

Our advocacy is substantiated by research that shows that a universal approach to quality child care promotes healthy child development at the same time as it supports families and their workforce participation, reduces child poverty, advances women's equality, deepens social inclusion and builds a knowledge-based economy.

While the research is clear, international comparisons indicate that, outside of Quebec, Canada's investment in child care is less than most other developed countries. It's high

time to act.

The Canadian public agrees. A 2002 national study of public attitudes showed that 90% of Canadians think we should have a nationally coordinated child care system, and 89% agree that quality child care is essential to Canada's prosperity. (*Canadian Child Care Federation and Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada*).

That's why we're seeking a strong "Commitment to Action", with clear and measurable outcomes, in these federal/provincial/territorial meetings. First, we expect all participants to support the development of a legislative framework for child care that enshrines the five key principles of quality, universality, accessibility, developmental programming and inclusion. We also need to see a timetable for the introduction of this legislative framework.

Furthermore, we expect agreement on a plan of prompt action that clearly demonstrates:

1. A fundamental shift from the current user fee and subsidy system to one that is publicly funded from general revenues derived from taxes, as in Quebec and other developed countries around the world. Research shows that publicly funded systems, with low, affordable user fees, are the most effective way to achieve the outcomes reflected in the five key principles.
2. A separate, dedicated funding stream for the new federal transfer to the provinces and territories, with sufficient and stable funding commitments to support the implementation of a publicly funded system.
3. A requirement that existing funding commitments under the ECD and Multilateral Agreements are maintained.
4. A requirement that provinces and territories maintain or increase their own child care funding, so that federal funds are used to supplement and build the system, not to replace provincial or territorial contributions to

child care.

5. Provincial and territorial accountability tied to plans, with timelines and targets, for using federal child care funds to build a universal, publicly funded system. This requirement recognizes that provinces and territories will develop their own priorities and related plans, while it confirms that these plans must move us towards a publicly funded system. Given the leadership role that Quebec has played to date, its autonomy can and should be recognized and respected through this process.
6. A commitment to a transition plan that moves to public and/or not-for-profit delivery of child care services. Public and not-for-profit delivery promotes accountable and stable community-based services, mitigates the risk of trade challenges, and allows limited public resources to maximize quality and developmental programming.

We believe that this Commitment to Action should form the foundation of a publicly funded, pan-Canadian child care system. Achieving such a system won't be easy. Strong leadership and collaboration will be required at all levels of government and throughout the community to ensure that all children in Canada have access to quality child care. However there is strong public support for such action.

We caution against further delay, study, indecision and disagreement that will result in one more missed opportunity. As Minister Dryden has said in meetings, 'the debate is over; now is the time for action'.

We expect your Commitment to Action and stand ready to assist with this transformation.