

The Hon. Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
Ministry of Education
5th Floor, 438 University Ave.
Toronto M5G 2K8

Sent via email

May 15, 2020

Dear Minister:

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) represents 5,000 child care workers in both the municipal and social services sectors.

On their behalf, we are writing to you in anticipation of the provincial government's announcement next week regarding the re-opening of Ontario's child care centres. We would like to outline several areas of concern we have about the terms of this announcement and their relation to other issues in the child care sector.

We learned from a recent government memo (dated May 11) that the government will be providing financial support to all childcare centres in the province, with the objective of ensuring they remain viable. This fund is also available to those centres who do not have purchase-of-service agreements with municipalities, Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs).

As representatives of child care workers, we agree that it is imperative that Ontario retain its existing child care spaces, particularly in a system that already offers limited accessibility. The May 11 memo leads us to believe that the promised financial support will assist all operators in covering their fixed operating cost within the existing provincial child care budget.

As workers, we are largely supportive of this measure and we recognize that operators will need funding to get up and running again. However, there is no dollar amount attached to the funding that will be provided to operators. Nor is there any recognition of the role that frontline child care workers will play in the re-opening of child care centres: not a single additional dollar has been provided to ensure the child care staffing that will allow Ontarians can get back to work

From point of view of child care workers and users, this is problematic. It means the existing pot of provincial funds is now going to have to stretch even further. We believe that in order to ensure the greatest viability, there needs to be additional financial support for Ontario's child care centres. When centres re-open, they will not operate at full capacity, because many lockdown restrictions will still be in place. Funding must be made available to ensure income for those spaces, while maintaining 100% level of salaries and benefits for staff.

For centres that have used their regularly transferred funds from municipalities, CMSMs and DSSABs have either continued to pay staff wages or have topped up workers' income from the federal Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) program. Operators may be required to pay these monies back once funding is reconciled starting in August.

In fact, reconciliation in its entirety will be detrimental to many centres. It will also penalize centres who did the right thing by continuing to pay their staff, in spite of limited and unclear direction from the province.

As workers and as representatives of their union, we are looking for the following enhancements as ways of stabilizing the child care sector, protecting child care spaces and safeguarding the existing workforce:

1. additional funds to be injected into the sector to ensure all centres' viability;
2. a province-wide starting rate of \$25 per hour for all staff working in child care centres in Ontario;
3. all staff working in Ontario child care centres to be eligible for the \$4 per hour pandemic pay.

Failure by the government to act on these matters will only lead to further disparities like the ones we have seen between child care workers in Peterborough and the Halton region. In Peterborough, emergency child care workers are earning \$30 an hour, because the municipality has chosen to top up workers' pay and harmonize salaries to the levels of municipal child care wages. By contrast, emergency child care workers in Halton— child care workers doing the *exact* same jobs as their Peterborough counterparts – are earning \$18 an hour.

These omissions point to larger cracks in the child care system. However, we have been encouraged by recent comments from you, Minister, in which you have called child care “a prerequisite for labour market participation” and have confirmed that the government must “make sure child care is accessible.”

We can only concur, especially since the COVID-19 crisis has shown us how vital child care is to our communities. As the *Toronto Star* recently called child care in a front-page headline, a “‘magic bullet’ to help boost economic recovery.”

We look forward to your expedited reply to our concerns.

Sincerely,



Fred Hahn, President
CUPE Ontario



Christina Gilligan
CUPE Associate Coordinator – Child Care



Carrie Lynn Poole-Cotnam, Chair
Social Services Workers Coordinating Committee

cc: Andrea Horwath, Leader of the Official Opposition
Patty Coates, President, Ontario Federation of Labour
Carolyn Ferns, Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care