

Hon. Doug Ford Premier of Ontario
By email: doug.fordco@pc.ola.org

Hon. Minister of Education Stephen Lecce
Ontario Ministry of Education
By email: minister.edu@ontario.ca

Re: Ensuring a viable and successful reopening of child care in Ontario

June 19, 2020

Dear Hon. Premier Doug Ford and Minister Lecce,

We are writing to share our concern over the recent announcement to re-open child care centres without being provided with a clear plan outlining details of financial support for our sector by the provincial government.

As Ontario members of a federated YWCA model, YWCAs help provide more than 3,000 child care spaces. We are keenly feeling the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we have seen within our member associations the extent to which this crisis is disproportionately impacting women and those in feminized jobs.

We applaud your commitment to supporting the child care sector during this pandemic and willingness to cover the increased costs of smaller classroom ratios, cleaning and PPE supplies, and so forth. However, opening our centres without any guarantee of increased funding to offset the massive increases in costs requires a significant leap of faith on our part that jeopardizes both the workers in our sector, as well as the service users.

The Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) and Ontario-Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance Program (OCECRA) are good stepping stones to recovery for our sector. However, as YWCAs, we are multi-service providers. In addition to our child care services, we provide a number of free programs for many children, youth and adults made most vulnerable in our towns and cities. We rely on fundraising events often held in the Spring; we rely on fees for service, as well as individual donations, sponsorships, and revenues from social enterprises. We lost access to virtually all of these avenues for funding the day the province went into lockdown. As a whole, our YWCAs in Ontario have already lost an average of 40-60% of revenue and lost hundreds of thousands of dollars in expected fundraising dollars. Currently, this puts all 3000+ of our child care spaces at risk.

Moreover, the necessary reduction in cohort sizes to eight children and two educators (8:2 from upwards of 15:1 pre COVID-19) means a vast reduction of an already insufficient pool of child care spaces, as well as lost fees for child care providers, and increased wage costs for operators.

In recent weeks, there have been numerous reports and articles outlining the integral role that child care plays in economic recovery. That is why we urge you to expand base funding for the child care sector and ensure decent wages for early learning childhood educators so that our provincial child care system can buttress long-term plans towards building a more equitable and robust economy post-COVID-19, particularly for women. For many families, child care was already unaffordable to begin with. This moment offers an opportunity to work with the federal government in advancing a publicly funded child care system that creates affordable and accessible child care services for all families.

We respectfully request further information about your plans to rebuild the child care sector and demonstrate a meaningful commitment to investing in this crucial part of any healthy economy. We echo concerns by our sector calling for emergency funding that ensures professional wages; substantial new funding for health and safety, staff training and supports; paid sick days; and a significant increase in base funding to remove barriers to affordable child care.

As civil society partners, we hope to continue our collaborative efforts with the government. We understand this is an unprecedented time and commend you for all your leadership thus far. We hope you will seriously centre recovery efforts in child care. Please do let us know what your plans are and how we can support.

Sincerely,

YWCA Cambridge

YWCA Toronto

YWCA Hamilton

YWCA Muskoka

YWCA St. Thomas Elgin

YW Kitchener-Waterloo

YWCA Canada