



Windsor's City Council's Child Care Decision

Creating Instability For Parents & Communities

The City Has Voted To Shut Down All Its Public Child Care Centres

On Feb. 1, hundreds of parents and child care supporters went to a City Council meeting to urge Council not to shut down its seven public child care centres plus two satellites. Despite two public opinion polls that voted 2 to 1 for keeping the programs open and limited information about the impacts of closure, City Council voted 5 to 3 to slam the doors shut on September 1, 2010.

Public child care programs have been the foundation of Windsor's child care services for decades. They have led the way in providing high quality, flexible child care, accommodating special needs children, and contributing to early childhood education training.

The City Has No Idea Whether Other Child Care Services Are Viable

The City has said that closing public centres is simply a matter of transferring children to non-profit and for-profit centres. But the City hasn't done its homework:

- Windsor community development and health commissioner Ronna Warsh, who co-authored the closure report, did not provide any data on the viability of the private sector in the medium and long term at the Council meeting. That's because the City did not study this issue.
- The City says that there are over 1,400 vacancies in these other centres. Not so, say private operators who have reduced staff levels given declining enrollment. In fact, no one really knows how many spaces are available, what age groups they're for, whether they accommodate special needs children or whether the centres are viable.
- Given the fragility of funding for the sector, and the fact that 1 of every 2 new businesses fail, opening and closing of child care centres is a common occurrence. In contrast, public child care has always been there to provide stability.

Alternative Services May Not Be Equivalent

Public child care programs often fill the gaps where other providers either can't or won't provide services because they are too costly or too complicated to run. For example, some public centres in Windsor offer extended hours and many are located in high needs neighbourhoods, and close to public transit. Public centres also offer a Work And Learn program to assist single parents to find employment

The 'Two for One' Deal Is A Myth

Some City Councillors have said that the city could purchase two child care spots for children in the private or non-profit sector for every spot at a public centre. This myth is based on the assumption that for-profit and non-profit operators all charge the same rates across age groups. Actually, rates vary from centre to centre and across age groups.

With the exit of four and five year olds from child care centres as the new full-day Early Learning Program is phased in, all centres will see their costs double or even triple. Child care programs generally rely on a combination of full fee and subsidized parents in order to be viable. Doubling and tripling the actual costs will drive full fee paying parents away from these programs, increasing vacancies and making them financially unviable.

Enrolment Isn't The Issue: A Shifting Environment Is

The City's staff report is based on a 10-month period when enrolment in all Windsor child care centres dropped. During this time, Windsor experienced the highest unemployment rate in Canada, and a municipal strike. Under these circumstances, a drop in enrolment of 80 children in public centres is not surprising. In fact, two of the public centres don't have low enrolment.

Currently, non-profit and for-profit programs also have vacancies that threaten their viability. Those vacancies, combined with rising costs as four and five year olds leave the child care system, will further destabilize all centres. Some centres have already laid off staff and closed rooms.

What Can Public Child Care Supporters Do?

Parents can call their MPP and tell them the province needs to release child care stabilization funds immediately. Call Service Ontario at 1-800-267-8097 to find out who is your MPP.

<p>MPP Dwight-Duncan Windsor-Tecumseh Riding 2825 Lauzon Parkway, Suite #211, Windsor, ON, N8T 3H5 Phone: (519) 251-5199 Fax: (519) 251-5299</p>	<p>MPP Sandra Pupatello Windsor West Riding 1368 Ouellette Avenue, Windsor, ON, N8X 1J9 Phone: (519) 977-7191 Fax: (519) 977-7029</p>
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Email a letter to the editor letters@thestar.canwest.com, or fax it to 519-255-5515, or mail it to: Windsor Star, Letters to the Editor, 167 Ferry Street, Windsor, Ontario, N9A 4M5. One or two paragraph letters are more likely to be published. Be sure to include your name and phone number, so the Star can contact you.

Five councillors voted to close our city child care centres: Councillors Dave Brister, Jo-Anne Gignac, Fulvio Valentinis, Drew Dilkens and Mayor Eddie Francis. Tell them to reverse their decision. Call 311 to find out who is your city councillor.

To receive Windsor child care campaign updates, send us an email at info@childcareontario.org