



80 Commerce Valley Drive E, Suite 1
Markham, ON L3T 0B2
Phone: 905-739-9739 • Fax: 905-739-9740
Web: cupe.on.ca E-mail: info@cupe.on.ca

January 22, 2026

The Honourable Paul Calandra, M.P.P.
Minister of Education
438 University Ave.
Toronto, ON
M7A 2A5

BY E-MAIL
paul.calandra@pc.ola.org

Dear Minister Calandra:

On behalf of over 300,000 members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Ontario, including thousands of child care workers and tens of thousands of other members who rely on quality, public, affordable child care in our province, we are writing to raise our concerns about the future of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) program.

With funding from the federal government to support the CWELCC program, significant progress has been made in recent years towards reducing parent fees. However, without adequate provincial funding or a robust workforce strategy, Ontario is failing to deliver on the promise of the CWELCC program.

The recent one-year CWELCC agreement your government signed with the federal government backtracks on the promise of \$10 a day average parent fees by March 2026.¹ Moreover, a recent report from the Auditor General revealed that Ontario has only added 75% of targeted new spaces and an estimated shortage of 10,000 Registered Early Childhood Educators needs to be addressed by December 2026.²

¹ "Canada and Ontario agree to one-year extension of the Canada-wide early learning and child care agreement," *Government of Canada*, December 4, 2025.

² "Performance Audit: Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Program," *Auditor General of Ontario*, October 1, 2025, page 4 and 6.

Fred Hahn
President

The federal contribution to CWELCC in Ontario from 2021-22 to 2025-26 is estimated to total \$10.23 billion, while the provincial contribution is estimated to be \$270 million over those five years.³ Early learning and child care is a shared responsibility. Inadequate provincial contributions are failing Ontario workers and families. The Ontario government must step up and do its part to adequately fund child care.

We join many others from our province calling for steps to be taken to expand this essential program. If more families are to access licensed child care there needs to be qualified workers to deliver it. Recruiting these workers requires significant improvements to wages and working conditions.

CUPE Ontario is calling on your government to:

- Extend the current one-year agreement with the federal government to five years and significantly increase provincial funding for early learning and child care, over and above the 3% annual investment growth from the federal government.
- Fund a workforce strategy that includes a starting wage of at least \$30 an hour for all child care workers and \$35 an hour for registered early childhood educators, as well as a defined benefit pension plan for child care workers. Initiate a bargaining process with child care workers in the province and their unions to negotiate improved wages and working conditions for workers across the sector.
- Support the growth of public and not-for-profit child care spaces and maintain restrictions on for-profit expansion, eventually phasing out for-profit operators through their conversion to not-for-profits. Allow the provincial government first right of refusal before the selling of any for-profit child care centre. Make further use of public assets like schools and universities to house new child care services. Prioritizing public and not-for-profit provision in child care is critical for maintaining quality.

Your government has also emphasized the need to “Protect Ontario” from the economic risks posed by Trump’s tariffs. If you are serious about protecting Ontario’s families and economy, investing in early learning and care must be part of your plan. The \$10-a-day system has already delivered measurable benefits: increased labour force participation among mothers with young children, significant financial relief for families, improved wages for child care workers, and funding predictability for operators.

³ “Performance Audit: Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Program,” *Auditor General of Ontario*, October 1, 2025, page 32.

Fred Hahn
President

Now is not the time to turn back. It is time to strengthen and expand the \$10-a-day plan to support workers, expand access, and give families the security they need in uncertain times. We are calling on your government to commit to bringing adequate funding to the table to support workforce recruitment and retention, expand public and not-for-profit spaces, and advance affordability and quality.

CUPE Ontario remains in steadfast support of child care advocates and coalition partners who are leading this advocacy work. Ahead of upcoming ministerial meetings we urge Ontario to be a strong advocate for the continued success and expansion of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care program. We remain ready and willing to speak more with you directly on these important issues.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fred Hahn".

President CUPE Ontario

Cc: CUPE National Officers

Social Services Workers Committee CUPE Ontario
Ontario Coalition for Better child care

Fred Hahn
President