

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Bill C-35 An Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada

Speaking Notes for Julie Bisnath, March 30, 2023

Program Coordinator, Child Care Providers Resource Network

Hello and thank you Mr. Chair and Committee Members for this opportunity.

The Child Care Providers Resource Network (CCPRN) is committed to the well-being and safety of all children. We are a non-profit, charitable organization with a mission to provide information, training, resources, and support to those providing child care in a home setting. For us, child care is the care of a child, regardless of who provides the care: parents, grandparents, friends or relatives, in-home nannies, or home child care providers—whether licensed or unlicensed, both of which are legal.

CCPRN was pleased to see the government introduce a national child care strategy, but we feel that the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care plan (CWELCC) is not nearly as inclusive as it could be—and like those who share our perspective, we advocate for equitable access, quality child care, and parental choice.

To meet the current and expanding demand, Canadian families need all forms of child care to be accessible and affordable. Limiting parental choice to one type of care conflicts with the notion of a "universal" plan and hinders access.

To improve access, the plan must acknowledge home child care, both licensed and unlicensed, as a valuable component of the child care system. Not only does it impact expansion as they are faster and less costly to open, but home child care also meets the unique needs of Canadian families by allowing them to choose a caregiver with similar values, a shared language, or a shared culture. In partnership with their caregiver, a strong bond is established resulting in a mutually cohesive relationship focused on the needs of the child. We know that family engagement is integral to each child's development.

Home child care also offers families flexible hours beyond the traditional 9-5 model as well as continuity of care with one primary caregiver—a feature not available in larger

centres. These low-ratio, authentic, and nurturing environments are found in communities, both urban and rural, across Canada.

Championing home child care as a central part of CWELCC would increase access to a diverse array of child care options. It would also support women entrepreneurs, including newcomers to Canada and racialized women. Home child care honours the experiences and unique qualities of these caregivers, many of whom are Early Childhood Educators, who provide essential services in their communities, enriching the lives of young children.

With less than 25% of children accessing licensed child care, CWELCC excludes more than 75% of Ontario children and families:

- Those choosing unlicensed home child care or an in-home nanny,
- those choosing informal care arrangements with a friend or relative,
- And those choosing to stay home with their own young children.

CCPRN believes that parents are competent and capable of making child care choices best suited to meet their child's and family's needs.

Even within the licensed system in Ontario, home child care providers are unable to obtain their own license. Instead, they are obligated to work under the umbrella of an agency licensed by the Ministry of Education.

An option for direct licensing would have an immediate impact on available spaces allowing greater access for families.

Incidentally, the collaboration of licensed and unlicensed home child care is not a new concept. Several years ago, CCPRN and the Canadian Child Care Federation worked together to develop and deliver a national home child care training program.

There are many opportunities for the government to work with all sectors of child care, but by focusing on their preferred form of care, CWELCC promotes inequitable access and allows for the erosion of parental choice.

An equity-based lens must be applied, recognizing that not all families or children in Canada are the same. Choice in child care, along with income-based testing, would pave the way for more inclusive and more equitable access.

CWELCC funding agreements need to be flexible and inclusive. Allowing the provinces to transfer funds directly to parents is the most effective and efficient way to achieve these goals. Reducing administrative overhead leaves more money for reduced child care fees for all families, regardless of their choice in child care.

In closing, I would like to share the following 2 quotes from parents who have chosen home child care:

The first is from Dr. Lisa Walker, Clinical Neuropsychologist:

Quality in home day care is knowing that your child is in a setting where they have a caregiver who truly cares, who treats the child as they would their own, and who is invested in fostering the healthy development of the child. It is clear to parents when they have a caregiver who enjoys and takes pride in what they do. That passion is then reflected in how they interact with the child, the activities they plan, and the environment that they foster. Quality means parents have the peace of mind of knowing that their child is not only safe but valued. When I found Brenda, I knew that I had found a person with integrity who would provide my child with the kind of quality care I was seeking.

And the second quote is from a parent survey:

I plan to stay with our current unlicensed home care provider because the quality of care our daughter receives there is far greater than the care she ever received at the licensed centre. I would love to have access to the reduced fees. Right now I feel as if I have to choose between the quality of care my daughter receives and a more affordable cost of care.

Thank you for your time today.