

October 15, 2009

Dear Member of Parliament:

Canadian parents need early learning and child care services to work. Child care yields high social and economic returns by promoting economic stimulus through job creation, facilitating parents labour force participation and increasing government revenues from employment taxes. It promotes healthy child development. It ensures fathers and mothers can participate in education, job training, and can enter and stay in the in the workforce. It moves families out of poverty and it builds strong, local economies.

In 2006, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance recommended that:

.....the government, in conjunction with the provincial/territorial governments should fund a national, accessible, affordable, high quality, publicly regulated child care system. This system should respect any provincial/territorial child care programs already in effect, recognizing the leadership of the province of Quebec

In 2007, there were 3.1 million children ages 0 – 12 years of age with a mother in the paid labour force in Canada, but barely 867,194 regulated child care spaces.

In 2006, the Government of Canada terminated the funding agreements on early learning and child care and flipped the money intended to build a national child care program into a Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB), a monthly taxable allowance of up to \$100 given to parents of each child under 6. A review of the federal government own website boasts that the flipped money is used by some parents to subsidize child care expenses, but is used by others for vacations, RESPs, clothing, diapers, and recreational activities.

The majority of the \$5.9B Canada currently spends on early learning and child care is primarily tax measures and unaccountable transfers.

To Canada's shame, the United Nations Children's Education Fund published a study in December 2008 that rated Canada's provision of early childhood education and childcare at the very bottom of 25 developed countries.

UNICEF, the Canadian Paediatric Society, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the Canadian Labour Congress are just some of the many well-established organizations presently calling on governments to take strong leadership on creating a national child care strategy to build accessible, affordable, quality early learning and child care services.

In April 2009, the Report of The Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science, and Technology released a report called Early Childhood Education and Care: Next Steps that calls upon Canada to be a champion for the families of the 21st century. The Committee's recommendations are:

1. that the Prime Minister appoint a Minister of State for Children and Youth, under the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development Canada, with responsibilities to include working with provincial and territorial government to advance quality early learning, parenting programs and child care, as well as research human development and early childhood development and learning;

2. that the Minister for Human Resources and Social Development appoint a National Advisory Council on Children, to advise the Minister of State for Children and Youth and through the Minister of State, other Ministers on how best to support parents and to advance quality early learning and child care. The Council membership is to include Parliamentarians, other stakeholders, community leaders and parents, with appropriate representation from Aboriginal communities;

3. that the Government of Canada call a series of meetings of federal, provincial, and territorial Ministers with responsibility for children and youth, beginning within one year of the report to:

a. establish a pan-Canadian framework to provide policies and programs to support children and their families; and

b. establish a federal/provincial/territorial Council of Ministers responsible for early learning and child care and parental supports, to meet annually, to review Canada's progress with respect to other OECD countries, and to share best practices within Canada; and

4. that the Government of Canada, in collaboration with provincial and territorial counterparts and researchers, create an adequately funded, robust system of data collection, evaluation and research, promoting all aspects of quality human development and in early childhood programming including the development of curricula, program evaluation and child outcome measures.

The Manitoba Child Care Association supports these recommendations and calls on you to ensure your party takes immediate action to get Canada's early learning and child strategy development back on track and moving forward by implementing them and by:

- leading the provinces & territories in the development of a system of high quality, not for profit, accessible, and inclusive early learning and child care services. The Government of Canada should transfer funds to the provinces and territories that are earmarked for early learning and child care and attach conditions to ensure quality and accountability.

- by 2020, federal support for early learning and child care services should reach 1% of GDP, through scheduled increases in annual increments to provinces and territories. Funds should be sustainable, increased annually, targeted to the provinces and territories that are committed to development of high quality early learning and child care services.

Public investment in young children through early childhood education and child care programs is one of the best investments governments can make. We are looking for investments in public financing and policy development to begin immediately and call on you - as Canada's government leaders - to make this happen.

Sincerely,

Michele Henderson, President