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BILL THAT MAKES \$10-A-DAY CHILD CARE PERMANENT MAY RESULT IN CENTRE CLOSURES

For Immediate Release

May 3, 2023— As Bill C-35 (the Canada Early Years and Child Care Act) approaches Third Reading, some child care licensees are growing increasingly concerned. Currently, the \$10-a-day child care program is funded through a series of bilateral agreements the federal government has signed with each province and territory. One of the aims of Bill C-35 is to ensure the program continues to be funded once the current agreements expire in 2026. However, wording in the Bill has many licensees wondering if their centres will even be allowed to continue participating in the program.

The original wording put forward in Bill C-35 committed the federal government to: *“facilitate access to early learning and child care programs and services — in particular those that are provided by public and not for profit child care providers...”* This was not amended at the Committee stage. Some licensees in the private sector are worried this wording will be used to exclude them. Most of the centres that could be excluded are small businesses owned and operated by women. In Ontario, roughly a third of licensed child care centres are in the private sector. In other provinces, such as Alberta, the proportion of private sector child care centres is much higher.

“By not amending the Bill to make it more inclusive, the federal Government has created a climate of uncertainty that calls into question not just centres’ future participation in the \$10-per-day program, but the future viability of some 30 per cent of Ontario’s licensed child care centres,” says Andrea Hannen, Executive Director of the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario (ADCO). “Uncertainty around the federal program means that expansion has been off the table for many licensees for a while now. But looking at the language of the proposed legislation, there are going to be licensees who simply won’t feel confident renewing their leases or mortgages if the terms extend past 2026.”

Demand for \$10-a-day child care is already far outstripping the supply of available spaces. Expansion efforts have not only been hampered by uncertainty about which centres stand to be included in the program in future years, but by critical shortages of qualified ECE staff. Based on the clause-by-clause deliberations on Bill C-35 at the Committee stage, it would seem that the framers of the Bill are fully aware of the precarious nature of the \$10-a-day program. At one point, there was even discussion about removing some of the language around the availability and accessibility of care with respect to the annual report the Government is supposed to produce about the program.

As it stands, MPs are unlikely to be able to provide their constituents with clear answers about the \$10-a-day program’s results in their ridings. On Monday, April 17, the Government responded to an Opposition question that under the current federal agreements *“the provinces and territories are not required to report data by riding or municipality.”* This means MPs are likely to be asked to vote on making the \$10-per-day program permanent without being able to accurately assess the early results, such as the number of new spaces created in their ridings, or how many families have seen substantive reductions in their child care fees.

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ADCO is the industry association for Ontario’s independent licensed child care centres, both commercial and not-for-profit. Independent licensed child care centres are those that are not run by public sector entities such as municipalities or school boards, or by large multi-service agencies such as YMCAs. Most are small businesses, owned and operated by women. For further information, please contact: the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario (ADCO) at admin@adco-o.on.ca or Andrea Hannen at 905-687-7610.