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SOLUTIONS TO CHILD CARE CHALLENGES HINDERED BY ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL THINKING

For Immediate Release

October 4, 2024--The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care program (CWELCC) has not lived up to its promises. Both parents and child care providers have expressed concerns about the program, noting that it has resulted in a system that excludes the majority of families with children in the age group it is designed to serve, that artificially limits the country's supply of licensed child care and that suppresses compensation levels for qualified educators. "Despite these shared concerns, there is little consensus within the child care sector about how best to address the program's many shortcomings," says Andrea Hannen, Executive Director of the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario (ADCO), the country's longest-standing industry association for licensed child care providers.

Some centres across the country are planning to use October as a month of awareness about the CWELCC's flaws, distributing literature to families and potentially staging walk-outs or rolling closures. ADCO recently issued a statement rejecting the idea that service interruptions for families are an acceptable way to make a political point. "There are more legitimate and effective ways to make the case that change is needed," says Hannen.

One of them is to subject the CWELCC to a thorough and independent review by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada. An audit is currently underway, as per the call of ADCO, supported by the Canadian Council of Montessori Administrators (CCMA), the Ontario Federation of Independent Schools (OFIS) and the Alberta Association of Childcare Entrepreneurs (AACE), earlier this year. "We really need good, objective data to understand what elements of the program are working for Canadians, if it is sustainable over the long-term and if it is achieving good value for families and taxpayers. We are hopeful that one or more of the Provincial Auditors General will also review the program," says Hannen. "This kind of thoughtful analysis is essential to finding a better path forward."

One of the things Hannen has found disappointing about both the federal government's approach to child care and a lot of the advocacy work being done in the child care sector is the oversimplification of the issues involved. "The fact is, families are complicated and Canada is a complicated country. What works for one child or family won't work for everybody. What works in one province won't work in another and even within the same community, what works for one child care centre could spell the closure of another." She urges both child care operators and government officials to embrace this complexity rather than try to boil everything down to a one-size-fits-all solution.

"Let's start with the diversity of Canadian families, consider the various kinds of supports that could be helpful to them and work forward from there," says Hannen. "Who says a universal child care program has to impose the same solution on everyone in order to work? Why not have a menu of options, so there's always something available that works for families as circumstances in their lives change and evolve? This is absolutely possible, but not as long as we focus false choices like funding provinces vs. funding parents, licensed care vs. unlicensed and so on."

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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 1-877-685-4288, ext. 1.