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CHANGES TO NATIONAL CHILD CARE PROGRAM INEVITABLE SAY CHILD CARE OPERATORS

For Immediate Release

October 24, 2024-- The Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care program (CWELCC) is unworkable in its current form, says the country's oldest child care industry association, the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario (ADCO), which represents both commercial and not-for-profit child care centres.

While ADCO was not involved in coordinating this week's protests at Queens Park and Parliament Hill, it has long voiced concerns about the program. In May of 2021, ADCO told the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, "*Taking a national, one-size-fits-all approach is risky. It could close thousands of woman-owned small businesses, destabilize existing provincial child care systems and cause chaos for families. This would leave taxpayers having to pay not just to create any new licensed spaces that may be needed, but also to replace all of the spaces that are lost.*"

"The protests we're seeing now are good examples of the kinds of chaos for families that we could see on the horizon even back then," says Andrea Hannen, ADCO's Executive Director. "We knew it didn't make sense for the federal government, which had no experience in child care service delivery, to be dictating to Provinces how to restructure their child care systems. We also felt strongly that parents, not government bureaucrats, should be in the driver's seat when it came to determining the best care options for their children."

Three years into the five-year roll-out, the CWELCC has been beset with problems. It excludes the majority of families with children in the age group it is designed to serve, it imposes artificial limits on the country's supply of licensed child care and it suppresses wages for qualified educators. "Parents were really sold a bill of goods when it comes to this program," says Hannen. "They were led to believe that it would be universal, that it would magically pay for itself through women's increased labour force participation and that it would be rolled out in a reasonable period of time. None of these things has turned out to be true." Hannen notes that changes to the program are likely inevitable, if only to address equity concerns.

"All families are paying for the program in the form of higher taxes, but not everyone with children in the targeted age group benefits from it," says Hannen. "Moving forward, that issue will need to be addressed, as will the issue of bureaucratic bloat. Currently, it feels like the program is creating more child care bureaucracy than it is child care spaces. Our elected leaders need to get focused on sustainability and efficiency in the ways they support families. We look forward to the Auditor General's review of the program for more insight on where it's working and where it isn't."

ADCO stands ready to work with both the current and the next federal government on practical solutions to help more families access care, including measures such as introducing a direct-to-families funding element and providing Provinces and Territories with greater flexibility to work with private sector child care providers, both commercial and not-for-profit.

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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.