



Government of Alberta - Legislature Office
204 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue NW
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

May 7, 2020

Dear Minister Schulz:

Thank you for our meeting on May 1, 2020, in which we discussed the re-opening of early learning and child care (ELCC) programs. Following this meeting, I did receive the draft press release you and your team had developed. We hope the news release shared yesterday with the child care sector will help the field begin planning for the re-opening of their programs in a safe, sustainable way.

While we appreciate Children's Services' phased-in approach, AECEA would like to again offer its help in developing a comprehensive system of ELCC for Alberta's youngest citizens and their families. AECEA would like to highlight the need for system planning, *with and for* the sector, and investment that will help stabilize and sustain all licensed and/or regulated ELCC programs, including centre-based child care, school-aged programs, preschools, and family day homes. AECEA believes that the health and safety of children, families, and early childhood educators must be ensured in any planning.

As discussed at our meeting on May 1, AECEA recently conducted a sector survey and case studies to better understand the experiences of programs during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their plans for re-opening and challenges in doing so. Through this work and in discussion with members and sector leaders, AECEA concludes that the ELCC sector and government should be working together to address the complex challenges facing child care in the province and to promote the well-being and resilience of all Alberta's families. Through our consultations, we have learned of the YMCAs of Alberta's Questions and Recommendations on the Safe and Sustainable Re-opening of Alberta Child Care Services document that was dated May 5, 2020, and submitted to the Ministry of Children's Services. We endorse the recommendations in this document; they align well with what we have heard across the province and what we learned from our colleagues in other jurisdictions that have already opened or are planning on re-opening.

AECEA has considered the government's phased in approach for child care and offers the following comments:

- Phase 1: Programs will require more clarity on how many months this funding will be available to cover core operating costs of programs. A one-time payment is not sufficient for programs to maintain viability.
- Phase 2: The information you suggested under this phase needs to be moved into phase 1. We require that the health and safety guidelines are in place before re-opening. Funding to support following these guidelines will be required immediately as centres re-open. A \$500 grant to purchase PPE will not be enough, as these precautionary measures will need to continue until a vaccine is found.

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- In addition to funding for PPE, our early childhood educators require proper training from Alberta Health Services on how to follow the health and safety guidelines. This is imperative, especially at a time when educator, children, and family health could easily be put in jeopardy like we have seen in Toronto and Montreal. Training should be completed before programs re-open.
- The recruitment and training dollars planned for Phase 2 need to be embedded within a comprehensive workforce strategy for the ELCC sector. The education, recruitment, and retention of staff is not a new challenge and requires further consideration. To ensure high quality provision, the workforce does not need more one-off training sessions; rather, they must be educationally prepared to provide high quality ELCC for children and for engagement and support of their families. As a foundation, educators require competencies, which include a basis in early years pedagogy, brain development, the Flight early learning and care curriculum framework, and ethical practice.

AECEA asks you to consider the redeployment of already budgeted amounts (wage enhancements and parent subsidies) saved for the re-opening of child care centres, as well as the \$45 million attached to the bi-lateral agreement with the federal government. Supply-side funding will be critical to ensure programs remain viable, of high quality, affordable, and available for all children and families requiring early learning and child care. We would request that government and ELCC sector leaders convene to combine their knowledge, resources, and efforts in the development of a plan for a high quality and sustainable child care system for Alberta. We know that ELCC is essential to re-stabilizing Alberta's economy. We need to ensure the plan to re-open these programs is carefully considered and in consultation with the experts in the field.

Please email me at aecea.manna@gmail.com today to set up a time for us to discuss the above and consider working jointly to address the complexities of what our child care sector and Children's Services is facing.

Sincerely yours,



Manna Middleton
Chair, AECEA

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