



May 26, 2020

Hon. Stephen Lecce, Minister
Ministry of Education
5th Floor, 438 University Ave,
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

SENT BY EMAIL: minister.edu@ontario.ca

Dear Minister:

RE: COVID-19 Interim Funding and Operating Policies for EarlyON and Child Care

On March 17, 2020, a state of emergency was declared in Ontario for a period that is yet to be determined resulting in the closure of all licensed child care centres and all facilities providing indoor recreational programs (including EarlyON Child and Family Centres).

The COVID-19 outbreak is having significant impacts on our members' operations that are designed to address the needs of families and the child care sector as a whole. We acknowledge the unsustainably rapid pace of change that is occurring during this unprecedented pandemic. However, we have two overarching concerns that we seek to resolve regarding your Ministry's funding and operating practices.

On March 21, District Social Service Administration Boards and Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (Service System Managers) received a memo from your Assistant Deputy Minister, indicating how Provincial monies were to be allocated.

In it, it stated that your Ministry would

“work with you to support the provision of licensed child care in specific locations for health care and other frontline workers” and that

“The ministry does not intend to recover funding for early years and child care services as a result of measures implemented as part of COVID-19 preparedness, including complying with closure orders and will work with you on how this funding is considered in our child care recovery plan” and that

“The ministry continues to depend on the authority and discretion that service system managers hold in order to make decisions that best support the early years and child care sector in their communities. Please continue to let us know how we can support your efforts during this challenging time”.

Funding Concerns

On May 11, your Ministry communicated that it will not allow Service System Managers to use any provincial funding to cover any shortfall that is not covered by the federal wage subsidy program retroactively to March 15, 2020. Yet as noted above, the March 21, 2020 memo directed Service System Managers to continue to flow funding to childcare centres and agencies.

Also of importance is the need to know who will be paying for non-compulsory benefits under the new cost sharing arrangements – in particular, Pensions, Short Term Disability, Long Term Disability, supplementary medical benefits and any other related benefits. In some circumstances they may be considered contractual benefits the agency would be obligated to pay and therefore could be included as fixed costs.

We agreed whole-heartedly that the funding approach used by your Ministry during the closure period must be to support financial sustainability of the Early Years and childcare sectors from the beginning of the pandemic. We also believe that a stable and accessible child care system will be critical to Ontario’s recovery following the COVID-19 outbreak. Northern Ontario municipalities need to know that Federal and Provincial monies provided during this difficult time will make this goal attainable and not pose an undue hardship on our communities. Not permitting Service System Managers to utilize any provincial funding retroactively to March 15, 2020 poses significant risk to both the municipalities that contribute to the cost sharing of childcare centres, Early Years, and the operators themselves.

Direct Communication with Service Providers

Great concern has also been expressed that your Ministry is communicating directly with childcare operators and not just Service System Managers on issues related to funding. In many instances this is inappropriate and undermines Service System Manager authority with childcare operators within their jurisdictions and purview of operations. This

direct contact also weakens trust among stakeholders. The Ministry's role in communicating funding policy changes needs to be clearly understood by all parties and be directed exclusively toward municipal Service System Managers.

Your Ministry depends on Service System Managers and our knowledge of the needs of our communities to make decisions that best support the early years and child care sector in our service areas. We depend on you and your government to be fair, equitable and transparent with funding and mindful of communications protocols with outside organizations that depend on Service Managers for funding. We ask that the Ministry and the Federal Government fund 100 percent of all emergency funding for Child Care during this pandemic. We also ask that communications related to funding – Federal or Provincial – go through Service System Managers only. This will ensure that system integrity is retained beyond these troubled times.

NOSDA has worked very well with your Ministry's staff and has established significant trust over a considerable length of time. We too, are grateful for your partnership and look forward to our continued collaboration going forward.

We look forward to your response at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Gawne". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Janet Gawne, Chair

Cc: Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister of Education
Shannon Fuller, Assistant Deputy Minister, Early Years Policy & Program Branch