

**Deputation
to the
Peel Region Council
Concerning Proposal to Close Child Care Centres**

January 26, 2012

9:30 a.m.

10 Peel Centre Drive, Suite A, 5th Floor

Brampton, Ontario

L6T 4B9

Submitted By:

Nancy Hutchison

Secretary-Treasurer

Ontario Federation of Labour

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today on the critical issue of retaining child care in the Region of Peel.

For three decades the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL), our affiliated unions and the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care (OCBCC), have organized and mobilized for the creation of a system for child care that is universally-accessible, high-quality, not-for-profit, regulated, and publicly funded, that would meet the needs of children and parents and provide decent wages and working conditions for workers in the sector. Working with the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and national groups and organizations, we have mobilized for a national system of early learning and care.

The Ontario Federation of Labour is the largest provincial federation of labour in Canada. Our affiliates represent over one million unionized workers employed in virtually every economic sector and every community across the province including Peel Region.

In this time of economic upheaval and uncertainty, child care, like no other public investment, is critical.

Child care is good for the economy – whether a good or bad economy. Child care gives families the ability to weather the storm to keep jobs, look for work, attend community colleges and universities and participate in re-training.

OVERVIEW

The Peel Region is a leader in providing child care services to one of the most diverse regions in Ontario. The region has created and delivered services to high-risk neighborhoods, like Neighborhoods Capacity Support Strategy (NCSS) and Knightsbridge/Kings Cross (Brampton).

It is well known that Peel leads early years' services planning through a partnership of over 40 agencies which helps oversee the planning and implementation of Early Learning Programs designed to allow children from ages 0-6 reach their fullest potential. Further, Peel has increased the quality of early learning and child care by investing in ECE wages to attract and retain staff.

The region has put a lot of thought, money and creativity into creating a diversity of centres and programs to meet the needs of families. Examples of this include:

- After hours child care at Chinguacousy.
- Integration of splash pads, a library, and even a full-size gym at one of the facilities.
- The Region of Peel has one of the first best start programs at the Lancaster facility.
- Lancaster also has a before and after school program in addition to children in child care. Child care for children from 6-12 is in high demand.

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- The municipal centres have specially trained staff and use a “Highscope” curriculum.
 - The Region of Peel has children’s services workers on site. They provide a wide range of family services including housing referrals not just for children in the region of Peel. Parents from any centre in Peel can get support and hand in documents for subsidy eligibility without having to go to the municipal headquarters.
 - The Region of Peel has outstanding facilities for child care centres. As regional taxpayers and through the Province, we have spent millions of dollars to build these purpose-built centres.
 - The most important asset of any child care centre is the staff. To date, the Region of Peel has been a leader in our community in terms of quality child care and decent treatment of staff.

Frankly, it would be wrong for the Region to close our excellent centres. These proposed closures of 12 regional child care centres would have a profound impact on parents, children and the entire community.

IMPACT OF CLOSURES

This Federation adds our voice to that of parents and community members expressing grave concern about the Peel Council's consideration of a report recommending the closure of the Region's 12 child care centres that was prepared by KPMG.

Closing child care centres targets the most vulnerable – children. Peel centres provide parenting support and help support vulnerable children and families. Peel centres have extensive programs for special needs children: what will happen to those families?

Peel is one of the fastest growing areas of the province. Families need two incomes for a decent standard of living. Peel Region has a low percentage of children 0-5 for whom there's a space – as low as 13%, whereas the comparable figure for Ontario stands at 19.7%. Therefore, the 859 spaces in the municipal centres are even more valuable.

Peel needs more child care, not less child care. The region has 107,320 children aged 0-6. Only 13,952 have access to a licensed child care space; a total of 440 licensed child care centers with 21,531 child care spaces.

There are over 3,100 children on the child care subsidy waiting list. The wait list increases by about 230 children each month. Families living in Peel cannot afford to lose even one child care space. Closing the 12 Peel municipal centres would mean a tragic loss of 859 high-quality spaces for children.

The 12 centres provide an important choice for parents. They have professional, long-time staff, great facilities, and serve food made on site. Closure means loss of over 200 jobs.

Closing these regional centres would have a profound impact on parents, children, centre workers and the community as a whole. Good quality, publicly-delivered child care adds to the quality of life in a community.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

The KPMG report on which the child care closures recommendation was made to Council was only publicly released 48 hours ago. This is far too short a time to enable a review by parents and residents, the very people who will be the most impacted.

I attended a community meeting Tuesday evening, January 24, 2012 where over 300 parents, child care workers and other residents came together to express their shock that closing child care centres was on the Council's agenda. None of these residents had been consulted. None had read the KPMG report. And none, until a week ago, knew that closing their centres was being voted on at today's Council meeting.

Peel parents and community members have the right to be consulted before such a profound decision is made by the Peel Regional Council.

CONCLUSION

The OFL fully supports the call of Peel parents, child care advocates and community residents: notably that instead of rushing this decision, the Peel Regional Council establish meaningful consultations with parents because they are most affected by this decision.

Across this province child care is in crisis. Child care is desperately underfunded. That is why parent fees are so high and staff wages are low. We need more money from the provincial government to fund child care.

We invite the Peel Regional Council to join with other Ontario communities to lobby the provincial government for stabilization of child care funding in the province's 2012-2013 budget as a first step to implementing a long-term plan for child care.

Respectfully submitted by the Ontario Federation of Labour.

January 25, 2012
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