

November 13, 2024

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North, 3rd Floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario
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I am pleased to submit this letter on behalf of RisingOaks Early Learning Ontario as part of your 2025 Budget Consultations. At RisingOaks Early Learning, we have a 40-year history of providing high quality early learning and care. We currently operate 9 – soon to be 10 - licensed child care centres in the Waterloo Region. We have a licensed capacity of over 1,400 spaces. At RisingOaks we build the foundation for learning, at the most pivotal time of a child's growth and development. Preparing them at this stage for a lifetime of learning is the key to their future, and ours.

I write to you not only as an advocate but as a voice for our dedicated early childhood educators who shape the future of Ontario's youngest citizens every day. At RisingOaks, we know that educators' working conditions are the children's learning conditions. To protect the quality of early childhood education, we must address the conditions that lead to burnout and promote a culture of well-being. YMCA WorkWell collected data from over 3,000 child care employees across Canada over the past 12 months, revealing troubling statistics:

- Despite high engagement levels, one in three child care employees and two in five child care leaders are experiencing burnout often or extremely often.
- One in five child care employees is considering leaving their role within the next six months.
- Over half do not feel recognized for their contributions.

These are not just numbers; they reflect the real workforce crisis we are facing. Early childhood education relies on well-trained, highly engaged professionals, but the current conditions make it challenging to retain them. The College of ECEs reports that twice as many RECEs working in licensed child care resign their membership after three years

compared to those working in the public education system or other settings.¹ Reports by the Atkinson Centre reinforce these findings, demonstrating only 44% of Ontario's RECEs are working in licensed child care. The CECE also reports only modest growth in membership with the regulator in the 2022-2023 fiscal year, with 5,204 new registrants, but 3,580 resignations.²

The new ECE wage floor of \$23.86 was welcome news, but it does not support the transformational change needed to sustain the system, yet alone to support expansion.

We also share concerns raised by the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario that "there are no wage improvements for non-RECE staff, like Early Childhood Assistants, and cooks who are vital to running a quality child care program. There are no increases for RECEs who currently make above the wage floor, or those working in licensed home child care, EarlyON centres or the broader early years and child care sector.

For budget 2025, we call on the Ontario government to do more to address the workforce crisis in child care. Join other provinces and territories who have already taken meaningful action to support the workforce, and as a result have seen greater gains in their expansion of the system. Ontario can do this through 3 key actions:

- 1. Fund a provincial wage grid that recognizes the value and experience of these educators. In order to reverse staggering turnover rates, we need:**
 - A salary scale of at least \$30-\$40 per hour for RECEs.
 - At least \$25 per hour for non-RECE staff.
 - Annual increases and steps to reward years of service.
 - Immediate implementation of benefit and pension plans.
- 2. Fund quality** through the provision daily, collaborative, on-site paid planning time to support high-quality programs.
- 3. Revise funding benchmarks to account for operating hours, the size of programs and ancillary workforce costs.** A centre with 39 children (0-5 years) receives funding for 1 FTE of a supervisor. However, a centre with 88 children 0-5, plus a school-age program only receives .72 of an FTE, but has more families and more staff to support.

¹ College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE). Membership Data Report, Licensed Child Care Infographic 2021. Retrieved from Private Communication.

² Ibid

Additionally, the benchmarks penalize programs that operate for longer hours and those that have ancillary costs to enhance program quality.

Taking action in these areas will directly enhance our ability to expand the system and open more high-quality early learning and care centres so that more children, families and communities can benefit. The first key to expansion is the workforce. The 2nd is to adequately fund expansion.

- 1. Advocate for the Early Learning and Child Care Infrastructure Fund**, led by CMHC, to be a top priority for immediate implementation. This fund represents a significant step forward in addressing our child care infrastructure gaps and meeting Ontario families' need for accessible, affordable, and high-quality early learning spaces.
 - By prioritizing this fund and implementing complementary provincial initiatives (such as provincial low-costs loans or grants), Ontario can make significant strides in achieving its child care goals and supporting the well-being of children, families, and educators.
- 2. Ensure Accessible School-Based Child Care** – Adjust funding benchmarks to cover facility costs in schools or prohibit school boards from charging rent to child care providers, helping to keep child care affordable and accessible for Ontario families.

These actions are feasible if we prioritize child care in our spending. The Financial Accountability Office has reported significant underspending of federal and provincial child care funding in Ontario. Rather than allocating \$3.2 billion to \$200 cheques, we urge you to redirect those funds to invest in sustainable, high-quality child care for Ontario's children and families.

This workforce crisis is real, but together, we can turn the tide. Investing in fair wages, well-being, and growth for Ontario's child care sector will secure a brighter future for Ontario's children and families.

The economic benefits of child care extend beyond individual families, impacting society and the broader economy in significant ways. A study highlighted by the McCain Family Foundation indicates that expanding access to early childhood education could yield up to \$6 in long-term economic benefits per dollar spent.

Quality child care plays a crucial role in promoting educational success, reducing criminality, and improving workforce participation, particularly for mothers. It can also



help businesses by reducing absenteeism and improving employee retention when child care support is provided. Investments in child care are good for children, families, communities and the economy.

Sincerely

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

Lori Prospero, CAE
Chief Executive Officer