



N.S. LEGISLATIVE

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my concerns. I want to start out by apologizing; as Tim Hausen mentioned this afternoon this chance to speak had only been extended a mere 29 hours before the law amendments committee was set to meet, therefore, I have not had adequate time to prepare. Minister Churchill's response of not feeling the need to consult with parents, residents, or affected parties, and citing the election results as reasoning was hurtful. When voting in an election we are essentially omnibussing a plethora of platform issues – and silencing folks on individual policy stances is overconfident and contemptful in itself.

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I went back to university when I became a parent. I realized that I was bringing a child into this world and I wanted to equip myself with the best possible education and recommendations to raise him to the very best of my ability.

A recent Freedom of Information request showed that there was no correspondence with centers, parents, or teachers were in place prior to the introduction and rollout of the program. This is problematic in itself because perhaps if consultation had happened, many of these concerns could have been addressed – or avoided prior to the rollout of this program. If we can't rely on the government to research and take care of our most vulnerable best interests. Who do we look too?

- My issues surrounding the program are as follows:
 - **Flexibility.** Whereas 80% of Nova Scotian families are working families; framing this program as a step towards a universal option is problematic taking into account the hours in which the program will be offered. This disadvantages parents who will still be in charge of finding space in excel, or after school programs. These additional programs could not only cost upwards of \$5000, but already have limited space and inadequate resources to deal with a new demographic of 4 year old students. Framing this as a "free" program fails to consider the additional steps and costs to any persons employed in this province.
 - **Demographic.** Current use in early childhood education centers is not reflective of demand. If you can't afford childcare, you are not likely to use it. If it becomes free, lots of parents would likely make different choices. Out of the 9000 4 year olds in the province, 5000 belong to working parents – this likely does not include students. This program is catering to less than half of the eligible population.
 - **Ratios.** In the Nova Scotia daycare regulations, preschoolers have a 1:8 ratio. Why does the government think they don't have to adhere to these rules; creating a program with significantly less infrastructure in place to accommodate these children?
 - **Infrastructure.** The current school system we have in Nova Scotia is not equipped to handle 4 year olds. They will not have access to bathrooms in the classrooms

- (which leaves an even more absurd ratio when teachers have to leave the room to escort children to the washrooms, or do we expect them to wander the halls alone?).
 - The playground spaces were not developed for children of this age; therefore raising safety concerns around the structures.
 - The yards in our currently operating schools are not fenced in.
- **Accessibility.** 4 year olds are not able to ride public transportation and outside of the HRM, locations are inaccessible to many. Not to mention with the pickup and drop off hours, this limits folks who are able to use the program in general.
- **Staffing.** This program is being placed into an already overburdened system. We just faced it's first province wide teachers strike this year. Adding a new demographic to these institutions will do nothing but increase the workload of staff, administration, resource staff, and the like.
- **Current Early Childhood Educators.** The implementation of this program undermines the early childhood education sector in this province that maintains a reputation for providing exceptional care to our children. This sector is already struggling with underfunding and inadequate wages. Losing an entire demographic that they are trained to handle to a newly developed, inadequate program is upsetting.

I think we can collectively agree that significant investment needs to be made into our early childhood education sector; however, I think we can also agree this is a step in the wrong direction. A step that disproportionately disadvantages an entire demographic that could utilize a program of this caliber.

With the lack of developmentally appropriate practice and research being followed, this program does not benefit children.

With the lack of flexibility and accessibility, this program does not benefit parents.

This program will place an additional financial burden and strain on the Early Childhood Education sector losing an entire demographic on short notice, therefore, this program does not benefit our ECE's or centers.

The increased workload to the already struggling education sector as a whole shows us, this program does not benefit teachers.

If we can agree this program does not benefit any of the folks directly affected by it, who are we benefitting? The lack of consultation and consideration for the prior leaves me wondering who is looking out for the best interests of our children, our workers, and working parents in this province.

If we want to provide accessible, free, and universal pre-primary services in our province – we should be looking to the infrastructure we already have in place. Increase funding to the Early Childhood institutions we have. The institutions with the relevant resources, training, education and research in place to properly care for this demographic.

I appreciate being provided the space to address my concerns to you folks; however, I can't help but wonder, if these spaces were provided previously – how many of the mentioned concerns could have been addressed prior to implementation.

In Nova Scotia, 25% of children arrive at school vulnerable in at least one developmental domain. It is known, when children start behind, they often don't catch up. This is an issue that needs meaningful planning, and universal access – not a band aid solution accessible for few.

I strive to consult experts, research, and data in my day to day life to better equip myself to parent to the best of my ability – I feel I should be able to expect the government to do the same when it comes to our children, our residents, and our workers. When experts are telling you that a program is problematic, is not a time for defense. It's a time to listen.

What Nova Scotia needs is, quality, affordable, flexible, inclusive, accessible and well researched childcare options. This program is none of those things.