

November 30, 2011

The Honourable Mary McNeil
Minister of Children and Family Development
PO Box 9057 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister McNeil,

As noted in First Call's recent briefing note to you accompanying our September 26th meeting, there are significant concerns among our coalition partners about the growth in commercial child care chains in BC. Our Early Childhood Development Roundtable participants asked me to bring these concerns to your attention.

For background, there are at least three commercial, for-profit child care models emerging in BC:

- a publicly listed chain modeled on the failed Australian publicly-listed company ABC Learning. It has more than 20 centres in Alberta and 7 in BC. This type of company has a responsibility and a requirement to provide a growing return to shareholders which means that they must reduce the cost of providing services (wages), increase the income received from the service (parent fees), grow the corporation through acquisition of real estate – or do all three.
- a chain which promotes its services as emergency or 'back up' solutions for companies whose employees can't find child care in their community. Most of this chain's services are in Alberta and Ontario, but Nova Scotia, Quebec, Manitoba and recently BC each have one or two centres. Not only is this service expensive, but as a type of care it lacks consistency for children with respect to interactions with peers and caregivers.
- a group of franchised services marketed as a Kindergarten for children aged one and up with a focus on "developing a child's intellect". This specialized service is also very expensive and raises 'schoolification' concerns, contrary to the evidence on the importance of play for young children's learning and development as recognized in the provincial Early Learning Framework.

Documentation about the spread of commercial, for-profit child care chains and research links about differentials in the quality of care offered between publicly and privately owned child care centres is available on the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC website: <http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/act/actions/NFS/articles.html>. Local evidence from Metro Vancouver indicates that child care fees at commercial centres are among the highest being charged to families.

No other young children's services have this profit motive built in to the service delivery model. Family and parenting support and drop-in programs, StrongStart centres, and the like are all run by non-profit organizations or school districts. Similarly, the K-12 system, even where it is privately run, i.e. independent schools, is in the hands of non-profit societies.

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A suggestion was made at our Roundtable that a moratorium on any public investment in commercial child care be put in place in BC to allow time for an adequate review of the research evidence and consequences of these models for children, families and early childhood educators.

We appreciate your consideration of our concerns and look forward to hearing your views on this trend.

Sincerely,

[original signed by]

Adrienne Montani
Provincial Coordinator

Copies: The Hon. George Abbott, Minister of Education
Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Representative for Children and Youth
Members of Cabinet Committee on Families First
First Call Coalition partner organizations
Greg D'Avignon, Business Council of BC
Wayne Robertson, Chair, Provincial Child Care Council
