

September 9, 2008  
For immediate release

## **An Open Letter to the Men and Woman Who Lead Federal Political Parties:**

Early childhood education and care should be one of the most important 21<sup>st</sup> century social programs. It is part of any vision of a Canada that works economically and works for its people. Good quality accessible child care is a perfect fit with the values of social justice and equity that Canadians espouse. Early childhood education and care is - at one and the same time - a foundation of lifelong learning and healthy development for children, essential to support parents' employment and learning, necessary in any poverty reduction strategy, critical to women's equality, an important element of reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples and key to social inclusion for newcomers to Canada. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is about rights and citizenship.

Yet Canada is one of the world's ECEC laggards. Canada is the lowest spender on ECEC programs of any Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) country and ranks at the very bottom of international assessments of ECEC access and quality. Many other countries now routinely provide publicly-funded early childhood programs for their three to five year olds but Canada has yet to take even this first step. Our record of neglect brings shame to Canadians who were once so proud of our record on social programs.

We have an opportunity in this election to begin to turn Canada around. We call on each of you, as the leader of your political party, to commit to:

- √ A national plan to make high quality early childhood education and care a reality over the next decade for all who want it.
- √ Increasing federal funds, starting with an additional \$1.2 billion in the first year.
- √ Federal legislation (*recognizing Quebec's distinctiveness*) to establish the conditions, criteria and principles for the accountable use of federal funds in the provinces and territories.
- √ Improved maternity/parental leave policy to complement the new ECEC program.

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This federal election is a very important one for Canada. Canadians are being offered radically different visions of our countries' future. The values that we vote for this fall will shape Canada in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We urge you to reflect this in your party's commitments to Canada's children and families.

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For further information:

**Jody Dallaire**

Chairperson, Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada  
506.961.1131 (cell)

*The Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada is dedicated to promoting a publicly funded, inclusive, quality, non-profit child care system. Membership-based and regionally representative, the CCAAC is a non-profit organization.*

[www.ccaac.ca](http://www.ccaac.ca) | [info@ccaac.ca](mailto:info@ccaac.ca)

**Shellie Bird**

Participant, Code Blue for Child Care  
613.233.0228

*Code Blue is a Canada-wide campaign to build a real pan-Canadian child care system. The campaign brings together parents, national, provincial and territorial child care organizations, labour, women's and social justice groups along with Canadians from all walks of life.*

[www.buildchildcare.ca](http://www.buildchildcare.ca) | [info@buildchildcare.ca](mailto:info@buildchildcare.ca)

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