Child Care Advocacy
Association of Canada

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L'Association canadienne
pour la promotion des services
de garde à l'enfance

Open Letter to the Leaders of Canada's Parties

We expect the 2009 Federal budget to include a $2.2 billion investment in child care services, along with a commitment to work with provinces and territories to build community-owned, quality, affordable child care.

Each of your parties clearly recognizes the importance of this budget and the responsibility the federal government has to both support the economy as a whole and to assist those most vulnerable to the effects of a recession. Further tax cuts will not achieve these goals. The upcoming budget needs investments in infrastructure that will create employment immediately and leave a long term legacy.

Child care services are a critical infrastructure investment. Our economy is dependent on access to affordable child care in good times and bad; people can't work, study or re-train without it.

In the short term, direct investments in a child care system:

1. Provide immediate economic stimulus to communities – child care is labour intensive and early childhood educators usually live, work and buy in their local communities.
2. Support the entire labour force – in addition to having a very high 'multiplier effect', accessible and affordable child care services allow parents to maintain their labour force attachment and obtain necessary skill development across *all* sectors of the economy.

As for the legacy of infrastructure investments, we can build more than roads and bridges. In the long term, investments in a child care system:

- Promote positive child development and are an investment in the economy of the future, particularly given our aging population and diminishing labour force.
- Help parents maintain employment, upgrade skills and keep their families out of poverty.
- Support women's workforce participation, education and training.

Research consistently shows that for every dollar spent on quality, affordable child care, there are overwhelming returns – between $2 and $17. But we cannot develop effective child care services through tax cuts and market incentives like the Universal Child Care Benefit. Direct cash transfers to families and capital incentives to build spaces provide no accountability for the quality and affordability of child care services that can be accessed. These failed market-based strategies ignore the experience of countries like Australia and indeed Canada – outside of Quebec - where such an approach has earned us last place ranking from the OECD and UNICEF in terms of early learning and child care standards.

Instead, the 2009 federal budget must include significant federal funding to provinces and territories that holds them – apart from Quebec and its existing child care system - accountable for achieving specific goals. The Fiscal Stimulus Plan prepared by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives calls for $2.2 billion in additional child care transfers this year. If these funds are tied to:

- direct operating funding for child care programs to lower fees, raises wages and create spaces; and
- public ownership and non-profit operation of facilities and equipment purchased or upgraded

you will have taken a significant first step towards ensuring quality affordable child care for all Canadian families and children who need it.

Some will say that Canada cannot afford to invest in child care in these uncertain economic times. Nothing could be further from the truth. Child care services are an essential part of every community's economic and social infrastructure - an economic stimulus with long-term benefits for Canada. We welcome an opportunity to speak with you before January 27th to share further details.

Respectfully,

Jody Dallaire

Jody Dallaire, Chairperson of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada

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