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OPEN LETTER TO ALL MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

As Parliament resumes, we urge you to work together to protect Canadians from the corporatization of child care and from the impacts of the current global economic situation. It is critical that you take action to develop publicly-funded, community-owned child care services whose sole purpose is to support healthy children, families and communities.

The urgent need for action on child care is clear. By all objective measures, Canadian governments, other than Quebec, have failed to ensure that families have access to quality, affordable child care services. Unlike any other public or community service, Canada's market-based approach to child care relies on groups and individuals to build spaces and parent fees to pay most of the operating costs.

[Multiple polls](#) confirm that Canadians want their governments to take action. Yet, [international studies confirm](#) that Canada still has one of the lowest levels of public investment in and access to child care in the developed world.

But, Canadian governments must beware of false fixes to our child care crisis. The Australian government thought fee subsidies to parents would promote child care choice, quality and affordability. Instead, their policy led to a dramatic increase in parent fees, triggering even higher public subsidies. Despite ongoing concerns about families' access to quality services, public funds helped to leverage and enrich the [corporate child care sector](#).

Recently Australia's largest child care corporation, ABC Developmental Learning Centres, went into [receivership](#). With care for thousands of children in the balance, the Australian government is now directly involved in this unfolding crisis and has already provided one \$22 million bailout to keep centres open until the end of 2008. As a result of their government's false fixes, Australians are shouldering the costs of market failure in child care and they have no public assets to show for their public investment.

Australia's experience is relevant because, to date, Canadian governments have not protected citizens from the corporatization of child care. [Repeated warnings](#) from the child care community across Canada were ignored, and now it is here.¹ Furthermore, it appears that Canada's public fee subsidies and the Universal Child Care Benefit continue to attract corporate interest. We understand that various provincial officials are being lobbied with false fixes such as child care property development and leaseback schemes. This is troubling indeed. As the current global economic situation should make clear – if it sounds too good to be true, it is.

The evidence from well-functioning early learning and child care systems elsewhere tells us that Canada needs to develop its own plans, invest its own funds and build its own publicly-funded child care system. We need to have democratic control of our public investment with expansion in non-profit or public services. The organizations that support our children's learning about sharing, cooperation and mutual respect must themselves be grounded in those same values.

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. Now is the time for all parties to protect Canadians by ensuring that quality, affordable, community-owned child care services are available to support children's development *and* to support families to find and maintain work, upgrade skills and achieve work/life balance.

¹ For example, last year 123 Busy Beavers, with links to Australia's ABC, bought centres in Alberta. At that time a 123 Director said he sees "opportunities in Canada as it appears to be on par with Australia 15 years ago." Walsh, Liam. *ABC Learning finds it's not child's play in Canada*, Courier Mail, November 25, 2007.