

January 2005

## **An Open Letter from the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada Re: Our position on auspice in an early learning and care system.**

The Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC) would like to clarify one of the central issues in the development of a child care system for Canada: whether governments should concentrate resources in the non-profit sector, or direct public resources to both non-profit and commercial services.

The CCAAC recognizes the sensitivity of this issue for many in the child care community. We regret that in recent months, the CCAAC's position on auspice in child care has been misrepresented in some quarters. For this reason, we are reiterating and clarifying where we stand on this important issue. Our intention is to correct any misconceptions and contribute to a respectful dialogue—both in areas where there is a great deal of common ground within the diverse groups in child care, as well as where there are different approaches.

With more than 70% of mothers with young children in the labour force, access to quality child care in licensed family homes and centres, which plays a central role within our communities, is essential. Yet currently, outside of Quebec, Canada lacks the framework and resources necessary to ensure that these services exist.

As we move forward to build a system, CCAAC wants to be clear about its position. Our organization believes that all existing licensed service providers—including family child care, commercial, non-profit, and public operators—should receive increased public funding and supports under the new program and be accountable for providing quality, accessible and inclusive child care. We recognize the contribution made by those who are currently operating for-profit child care services in many communities. At the same time, we believe that federal and provincial/territorial funding for expansion of new services must be restricted to the non-profit sector.

We have worked with many for-profit operators who are dedicated to providing quality services, and who put the interests of the children they serve first. Many private operators across Canada have tried to meet the needs of families in their communities in the absence of any infrastructure or government support. We also note that there is widespread agreement among us on many of the fundamentals of a new system, including the need for action to improve quality.

We also trust that we all agree that children and families will not be well served if government tries to use the existence of different approaches on the issue of auspice as an excuse for not taking action on this critical building block of a quality early learning and care system. We intend to do everything in our power to make sure this doesn't happen.

The CCAAC believes that our governments have the responsibility to put in place a model of child care that systematically ensures all resources are directed towards producing the highest quality system possible. Even the Government of Canada's all party Standing Committee on Finance recently recommended that "The federal government, along with interested provincial/territorial governments, at the earliest opportunity announce initiatives to...include a

national, accessible, affordable, high-quality, publicly funded, publicly regulated, not-for-profit child care system<sup>1</sup>.

The research is clear that non-profit child care generally serves children and families better, and provides better support to staff. Overall, non-profit centres exhibit the elements that are associated with higher quality care: they hire staff, including directors, who are better trained and better paid, provide more care for subsidized low income children and children with special needs, and have more favourable child-staff ratios. Through the nature of their governance models, they are accountable to parents, governments and taxpayers and are developed in a way that responds to the needs of families and communities first. These factors all enhance quality—and better quality is a key goal for Canada’s new child care system.

Research and international experience also point to the importance of integrated approaches to child care, for example with the education and health systems. Community-based, non-profit services are best able to integrate with other child and family services and have longer-term stability. With substantial public funds involved, we can ensure that growth and expansion are organized and rationalized. These are some of the reasons why expansion in the non-profit sector has been a foundational principle of the CCAAC since its inception in 1982.

There is also good reason for us all to be concerned about the possibility of losing control of our child care system to corporate chains if growth is not restricted to the non-profit sector. Trade agreement challenges under North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) could open the way for large commercial chains to operate in Canada. In countries such as Australia that are living the experience of “big box” child care, there is ample documentation showing that profits, not quality or children, come first. It is in all of our interests, including those of Canada’s commercial child care operators, to work together to keep corporate chains out of our child care system.

Those of us who are working towards a high quality child care system that is good for children, and supports parents, families and skilled staff share a lot in common. Of course, we don’t always agree on everything. But maintaining respect for one another, focusing on the common values that unite us, and engaging in constructive discussion where we have different points of view is the way the CCAAC believes we can help build a system. We have always been committed to moving forward in this way—and will always remain so. Let’s find a way to build on our strengths, overcome our barriers, and continue to keep the highest quality outcomes for children, families, women and communities at the heart of the matter.

Sincerely,

***Debra Mayer***

***Jamie Kass***

Co-Chairs  
Council of Child Care Advocates  
Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada

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<sup>1</sup> Recommendation 27, Moving forward: Balancing priorities and making choices for the economy of the twenty-first century. Pacetti, Massimo. 2004. pp.116-117. <http://www.parl.gc.ca>