



CANADIAN FEDERATION OF  
INDEPENDENT BUSINESS

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Hon. Heather Forsyth  
Minister of Children's Services  
Room 424, 10800 – 97 Ave.  
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister:

As you may know, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) represents over 9,200 small- and medium-sized business members in Alberta, with 105,000 across Canada. We have members in every region and sector of the economy and we represent their interests before all levels of government on a host of important issues.

We are writing today on behalf of our private child care members in Alberta. CFIB was pleased that the provincial government set out to consult with employers, including child care operators, on the creation of child care spaces. We recognize that the consultation had to occur quickly as you are meeting with your federal counterparts later this month. However, in the future, CFIB would encourage government to allow for longer consultations to receive more meaningful feedback from employers.

## 1. Key Issue

### 1.1 Shortage of Qualified Labour

To begin this discussion, it is imperative to state that one of the key issues facing our child care members in Alberta is the shortage of qualified labour. It is a high priority issue for 77 per cent of our general members in Alberta – the highest recording ever seen in Alberta or across Canada since CFIB began tracking this issue in the 1980s. Traditionally, the highest priority issue for CFIB members is the total tax burden imposed by all three levels of government. For the first time ever, concern over the shortage of qualified labour also exceeded the total tax burden in Alberta in 2006.

The shortage of qualified labour is also a key concern for our private child care members. Many are struggling to recruit and retain sufficient staff to care for the children currently in their centres. The shortage of staff is also a key concern for firms looking to start in the industry, or existing firms looking to expand their capacity.

*The government should continue to focus on the people who fill these spaces (front-line staff). Space creation is impossible if you do have staff to look after the children. Funding needs to go to wage enhancements and professional development for Early Childhood Professionals.*

~ Child Care Member, Northern Alberta

*Day cares in Alberta were really counting on wages being supplemented more and more each year, and now that doesn't look like it may happen. Many people are even worried if Alberta will be able to sustain the current funding in the future as well without the federal dollars.*

~ Child Care Member, Southern Alberta

While CFIB recognizes there is no single solution to Alberta's shortage of qualified labour, there are concrete steps government can take to alleviate this challenge for all employers in the province. For example:

- Reduce taxes to free up funds for recruitment, retention and training.
- Ensure any changes made during the current Employment Standards Review are fair to both employees and employers and allow for more flexibility in the workplace.

- Reduce government red tape to allow financial and human resources to be dedicated to more value-added activities. For example, we have received some feedback that the accreditation process for child care operators can be bureaucratic and tedious, particularly given they are so short-staffed. Some have suggested that funding for recruiting, supplementing wages and training are the building blocks to seeing more day cares becoming accredited.

Therefore CFIB urges your government to evaluate any proposals in light of the significant labour shortage affecting child care operators in Alberta.

## 2. CFIB Principles for Child Care

### 2.1 Keep it Fair

As you endeavor to work with the federal government, CFIB urges you to ensure that any proposals will be fair to privately funded entities. Many have suggested that there has been an inherent bias in many national programs in favour of public sector or non-profit child care operations. Ensuring that any support programs are equally available to operators in the public, non-profit or private sectors is a major priority for CFIB.

*Non-profit does not mean higher quality, nor does "for profit" actually mean we are making any profit, we just wanted to have more control over what we can provide.*  
~ Child Care Member, Southern Alberta

*There is a misconception that non-profit is more accountable. Not so, as a private operator, we...are required to follow the same rules and practices.*  
~ Child Care Member, Southern Alberta

It should also be easily accessible by smaller firms as it is by larger firms. Further, any proposals should be equally available to businesses and families in both urban and rural settings.

### 2.2 Keep it Simple

CFIB also wants to ensure that any proposals would be simple to understand, implement and comply with. Government may also want to consider providing assistance to firms in dealing with the regulatory burden and costs associated with starting up a child care facility.

*To encourage the creation of more child care spaces, provide grants to new daycares.*  
~ Child Care Member, Southern Alberta

### 2.3 Keep it Flexible

As you know, child care needs can vary from province to province, from community to community and even from business to business. Therefore, CFIB urges government to ensure any proposals are flexible to accommodate these differing needs. In addition, government should provide flexibility so that firms can come up with creative solutions for their employee's child care needs (ie. pooling of businesses - strip malls/highrises, or businesses working in partnership with local agencies/schools, etc). These resourceful approaches should be valued and allowed for under any new proposals.

### 2.4 Keep it Cost Efficient

CFIB strongly urges government to exercise fiscal discipline in evaluating new proposals. Any initiatives should be fiscally responsible and achieved within the governments' current budget. Do not finance new proposals with new/increased taxes.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback. We hope our feedback will be helpful for you. Should you wish to meet to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact us at (780) 421-4253.

Sincerely,

### **Original signed by**

Daniel Kelly  
Vice President, Western Canada

Janine Halbesma  
Policy Analyst, Alberta