



Office of the Premier
7th Floor, One Government Place
1700 Granville Street
Halifax, NS
B3J 1X5

January 20, 2022

Re: Canada-wide Early Childcare System

Dear Premier Tim Houston,

We are writing to you today to express our grave concern about your government's proposed Canada-Wide Early Learning Childcare System's impact on our business owners and the staff of all businesses dependent on stable childcare.

This letter is being submitted to you on behalf of the members of the Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce, the Pictou County Chamber of Commerce, the Yarmouth and Area Chamber of Commerce, the Strait Area Chamber of Commerce and the Amherst Chamber of Commerce, collectively serving more 1,500 members that represent a diverse cross section of the local economy.

In recent days our Chambers have had conversations with many childcare businesses, licensed privately-owned and not-for-profit, as well as unlicensed providers. All agree that there is an urgent need for better wages for Early Childhood Educators, increased availability of spaces for children in care centres and affordable rates for all families. The deep concern stems from the lack of detailed information, timelines and disregard for business your government has shown toward these vitally important care providers. Your plan's vague details have caused confusion and fear for business owners, staff and parents. Our childcare providers are the cornerstone of our communities, enabling our workforce to gain meaningful employment.

On January 19, the Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce hosted a discussion with five privately-owned childcare centres from our region. We listened intently as these dedicated men and women shared their views on the current rollout of the provincial-federal affordable childcare agreement, which will impact their industry. We recorded it and posted it on our YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZwqVZ4MjEQ>). We encourage you, your MLAs and your Ministers to view it to hear these operator's first-hand accounts of how this potential agreement will impact them.

Combined, the panellists represented 281 spaces for early learning in our community. The discussion provided clarity on many common themes among the group. First and foremost, they

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are deeply passionate and committed to the growth and development of the children in their care.

They clearly articulated the reasons why your government's proposed three options for private childcare centres are not acceptable and essentially leave them with no reasonable choices

The lack of consultation by your government with these providers, expected to make life-altering decisions, is appalling. The lack of communication and "consultation" leading up to the private meeting with childcare operators on January 13 was limited. We have been told a survey was circulated to operators last fall, which included what some are calling leading questions. Despite being promised information by the end of 2021, these valued operators did not receive briefing documents until the January 13 meeting, rendering them ill-prepared to pose meaningful questions to your representatives.

This lack of information and heavy-handed, rushed approach to push this program through has broken the trust of operators, and private business owners as a whole, with the government.

An interesting point made by several childcare centres during the discussion was the fact that some are already offering \$10 a daycare, or less, to families in need with the support of subsidies and government programs.

Our business owners have conveyed to us that they believe the agreement presented last week by the provincial and federal government was ill-conceived and poorly thought through. As a result, the wellbeing of 190 plus privately-owned childcare operators and more than 9,700 children, as well as hundreds more in unlicensed centres, is being jeopardized in an effort to access a pool of funds for early childhood learning offered by the federal government on a tight timeline.

We acknowledge that today, January 20, your government has agreed to lift the looming March 18 deadline for private operators to select one of the three proposed options listed in the plan.

We ask that you immediately re-engage with childcare operators across the province in meaningful, constructive, considerate discussions to negotiate a sustainable plan that works for business, government, parents and most importantly, the children of this province. We are aware that proposed agreements in Alberta and New Brunswick demonstrate that they can invest in affordable early learning and childcare while including private sector childcare providers in their models. This is an opportunity to support and grow business in Nova Scotia.

During your government's news conference, you noted this was a historic and transformational change in the childcare system. We support efforts to provide affordable childcare to families so they may continue to participate in the workforce and help grow our province's economy.

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However, we cannot support your government in forcing hard-working, dedicated business owners to give up their livelihoods, the majority of whom are women.

Sincerely,

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of Commerce

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Susan Corkum-Greek, Minister Economic Development
Hon. Becky Druhan, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development
Trevor Boudreau, MLA Richmond
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