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**For immediate release**

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**Chambers ask government to renegotiate terms for privately owned childcare centres**

**TRURO** – Chambers are amplifying the voices of locally owned and operated childcare centres asking government to halt its role out of a new childcare agreement in an effort to renegotiate conditions with private operators.

A joint letter was sent to Premier Tim Houston’s office on Thursday, along with 16 MLAs and Ministers, and Colchester-Cumberland MP Stephen Ellis, 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.

The Chambers expressed concerns they have heard from privately-owned childcare centres about the impact on their businesses by the proposed $605 million Canada-Wide Early Learning and Childcare agreement which aims to drop childcare fees to an average of $10 per day by 2026 under the deal.

“Many privately-owned childcare centres are viewing what the government is proposing in its three options for businesses to participate in this historic agreement as a ‘hostile takeover’,” said Matthew Mossman, President of the Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce. He said in recent weeks Chambers have had conversations with many childcare businesses, licensed privately-owned and not-for-profit, as well as unlicensed providers. The Chambers acknowledge the province has agreed to lift the looming March 18 decision deadline for privately-owned childcare centres and has committed to reassessing options, however, the Chambers stand firm that greater engagement and consideration of business is needed before finalizing the deal.

“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,” said Mossman. “The deep concern stems from the lack of detailed information, timelines and disregard for business government has shown toward these vitally important care providers and the release of a plan with vague details have caused confusion and fear for business owners, staff and parents.”

On January 19, the Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce hosted a discussion with five privately-owned childcare centres, now available for viewing on the Chamber’s YouTube Channel, (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZwqVZ4MjEQ>) where they shared their views on the current rollout of the provincial-federal affordable childcare agreement.

“They clearly articulated the reasons why the government's proposed three options for private childcare centres are not acceptable and essentially leave them with no reasonable choices,” said the Chamber President.

“We ask that government 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.”

Mossman believes this agreement could be an opportunity to support and grow business in Nova Scotia rather than shut businesses, predominantly owned and staffed by women.

“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,” said Mossman.

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

He is calling on parents, local business owners and their staff to share their support for locally owned childcare centres. The Chamber has prepared resources and information to assist those wishing to send letters to their MLAs which can be accessed at www.trurocolchesterchamber.com.

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