

Quality Early Learning Network

Provincial Five-Year CCEYA Legislative Review

Integrated and Sustainable Licensed Child Care in the New Normal

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Context

The five-year legislative review of the *Child Care and Early Years Act* is occurring at an unprecedented time in Ontario. Virtually overnight, **COVID -19** shut down the province including both the licensed child care sector and the education sector for more than four months, leaving children, families, educators and employers scrambling.

Updating and revamping the CCEYA at this time underlines the larger crisis facing the sector and the children and families that it serves. COVID – 19 has demonstrated that a strong and viable licensed child care sector is an essential service, not only for the healthy development of children but also for the functioning of a strong economy, especially as it enables women to participate more effectively and fully in the workforce.

As operators on the front lines we have a number of policy and technical recommendations that will improve the quality of child care while reducing the regulatory burden on providers. Child care is complex. The funding formula is opaque and inadequate. The layers of regulation by government are cumbersome.

However, our collective challenge is that the 5 -year review of the legislative and regulatory framework is only one element of a system that, even prior to the pandemic, was in crisis. This review cannot be done in a vacuum. It is but one component of a much bigger issue: the continued viability of the child care and early learning sector.

The COVID -19 pandemic has exacerbated fundamental challenges facing the sector:

- Staffing shortages across the province;
- Inadequate funding; and
- The lack of an integrated approach that ensures effective collaboration between licensed operators, public health, CMSMs/DSSABs and Boards of Education.

The five-year review needs to lead to:

- Secure, consistent funding streams that allow for innovative and flexible responses to changing circumstances; and
- Effective, mandated collaboration between licensed operators, public health, CMSMs/DSSABs and Boards of Education with the goal of maximizing the use of available resources to meet the needs of children and their families in a seamless, integrated manner.

The review of the *Child Care and Early Years* is not only timely, but essential, to enable the sector to better meet the needs of both children and their families. **COVID – 19** demonstrates the importance of responsive and nimble legislation and regulation that supports quality during both “normal” circumstances and in times of crisis.

The QELN believes that the following four broad policy objectives need to inform the foundation of the review:

- 1) Affordability, accountability and sustainability matter** - The **CCEYA** must support high quality while minimizing the red-tape and unnecessary bureaucracy that limits the ability of licensed operators to respond quickly and effectively to the needs of children, families and the communities.
- 2) Cooperation and collaboration between the child care sector and the education sector matters**- Align **the Education Act and the CCEYA** to streamline the delivery of a collaborative, integrated system of child care and early learning.
- 3) Children and families matter** - **The quality of their daily lived experiences must be at the forefront of legislative and regulatory review for the licensed child care and education sectors.** The strength of our economic recovery depends critically on the success of the review.
- 4) Balanced, risk based regulatory framework** - The **QELN** is making several recommendations to reduce red tape and duplicative administrative requirements. We are NOT recommending an unlicensed, unregulated patchwork of care.

Both centre- based and home-based child care must continue to be licensed and accountable to families and to funders. A licensed system is also more likely to be compliant when there are public health and other measures required to protect our youngest citizens. Furthermore, a licensed, accountable system is able to quickly respond in a crisis while maintaining quality and the legislation needs to allow for this. The recommendations of the **QELN** are presented in this context – building legislation and regulations that support and enhance quality experiences, while minimizing the administrative burden.

Child Care in the 21st century

*The **QELN** vision- Licensed, regulated, accountable child care that provides high quality, safe experiences for children and their families and where unnecessary red tape and administrative requirements do not consume time, effort and energy which takes away from that which is most important: creating early learning and care environments in which children, families and educators belong, can express themselves, are able to actively engage and whose well-being is supported.*

The **QELN** believes that this is the time to address and resolve longstanding challenges in the sector. The Five-Year review is an opportunity for government and the sector to be bold and innovative. The pandemic has taught us that for the sector to grow and prosper we will need to do things differently. The review is not merely an opportunity to make minor amendments to the regulatory framework to reduce the administrative burden and reinforce the importance of quality child care and early learning in licensed

centres and home-based care. It is an opportunity to ensure that the updated regulatory, policy and funding framework ensures the sustainability of a flexible licensed child-care sector that meets the needs of the new normal. The new system that emerges must be one that is integrated, properly funded and of high quality. Children and families deserve nothing less and now our economy depends on it.

Who is the Quality Early Learning Network?

The **Quality Early Learning Network (QELN)**, whose members are all multi-site children’s services providers and who offer a range of early learning programs including but not limited to licensed group centres, licensed home child care and parent/child centres including Ontario Early Years Centres, is committed to strengthening the quality of programs for young children and their families. The QELN members provide a range of early learning programs and services to more than 60,00 children from infancy through age twelve. Together we employ more than **11,600** educators, assistants and support staff.

OUR VISION – An integrated system of quality services for children and families delivered by not-for-profit community agencies and the public sector who work collaboratively in the best interests of children, families, educators and communities.

MISSION – The **Quality Early Learning Network** will work collaboratively with public policy decision-makers to develop, deliver and sustain a community based, not-for-profit system of early learning and care services for all children and families which is accessible, affordable, inclusive and effective.