

July 28, 2020

The Honourable Ahmed Hussen P.C., M.P.
Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6



Dear Minister Hussen:

On behalf of the more than 390,000 members across the country represented by the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), I am writing to you about the urgent need for a national child care system. NUPGE members work in child care. NUPGE members are also parents, many of whom are critical service workers who have been on the frontlines of the pandemic these past months.

As you know, families across Canada have been struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic. Working parents scrambled to find child care arrangements, as schools and many child care settings closed. Parents found themselves working from home while also juggling child care and home schooling. Many children, especially those requiring additional support, have missed out on learning experiences and supports that are crucial to their development.

Women's labour force participation has dramatically declined as many women reduced their hours or left their jobs to care for their children, undoing the progress of recent decades. The gender employment gap among parents with young children widened significantly between February and May of 2020, according to recent research.

Early childhood educators and child care staff who continued to work through the pandemic have been faced with the enormous challenge of continuing to provide safe and nurturing environments for children amidst a pandemic. The many child care providers that closed faced uncertainty about their future. The sector also saw widespread layoffs.

As we face increased reopening, an uncertain school year, and a looming second wave of infections, families and staff are understandably worried. Parents are unsure how they will return to work without access to child care. Early childhood educators and child care staff are concerned about health and safety, financial and staffing resources, and children's wellbeing.

We were pleased to see your government recognize the need for safe, affordable, and high-quality child care during the pandemic and beyond, with the recently announced federal transfer funds. We commend you for taking an active role in supporting access to child care across this country. As your government has recognized, child care will be essential to the economic and social recovery. We agree that the federal government has an essential role to play.

However, we believe that you must go further. Now is the time for a universally accessible, publicly funded, not-for-profit, and high quality child care system that fairly compensates workers in a unionized workforce.

The evidence has long been clear: child care provides an enriching environment for children, enables working parents, especially women, to participate in the workforce, and contributes to a strong economy overall. A well-funded system could provide fair compensation to its critical workers. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the value of child care clearer than ever.

We call on you to commit to further federal funding transfers to the provinces and territories towards a universal public child care system, similar to Canada's public health care system.

This would enable high quality child care to be accessible to all families who need it. The funds must also ensure fair wages for early childhood educators and child care workers, a historically underpaid and undervalued workforce made up of predominantly women workers.

While child care is not simply a women's issue, a universal public child care system would make a valuable contribution to advancing gender equity. As a feminist government committed to gender-based policymaking, we urge the Liberal government to be the federal government to finally implement a national public child care system.

NUPGE has long advocated for a universally accessible, publicly funded, not-for-profit, and high quality child care system that fairly compensates workers and enhances unionization. But we sense the renewed urgency of this present moment marked by a pandemic, economic recession, and highly uncertain future. We hope you do too.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with your office to further discuss our concerns and recommendations.

Sincerely,



Larry Brown
President

cc: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P., Prime Minister of Canada
The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P., Deputy Prime Minister
The Honourable Jagmeet Singh, P.C., M.P., Leader of the NDP
Bert Blundon, NUPGE Secretary-Treasurer
National Executive Board