

To Whom It May Concern,

There is a child care crisis in East Hants.

Of the 9500 new Early Learning and Childcare spaces being added in our province (which will **still not meet the needs of the province**) - NONE have, as of yet, been added in East Hants. By percentage, we are the fastest growing community in the province outside of Halifax - so there is some disconnect here. To see a full list of the expansion project updates, you can follow this link:
<https://childcarenovascotia.ca/families>.

As of January 22, 2024, based on our inquiries with all our local centres, we have discovered Tots Academy has 145 children on their waitlist; East Hants Childcare Centre has a waitlist that varies between 150 to 200 at any given time; Elmwood Childcare Centre has 275 on their waitlist with 'additional inquiries coming in everyday'; and Carmie - from Carmie's Childcare Centre advised us her waitlist numbers are the same as the other centres.

What this lack of care means for our family (come September), and countless other families, is that we have **no options** for childcare. From our perspective as entrepreneurs and business owners in our community this means that we, as well as other local businesses, are going to have an increasingly difficult time hiring people due to lack of childcare. What that means to our family is one of us will need a reduction our workloads to part-time employment when our daughter starts grade primary due to lack of after school/summer care. As individuals who care deeply about the social welfare of our community and community members we foresee this \$10 a day childcare program, which was presented as a means to support women in the workforce by offering affordable childcare is, in fact, not at all meeting its desired goal.

We will note, we have heard through discussions with childcare providers, there are discussions being had with local Not-for-Profit Childcare Centres regarding the addition of after school programming/care at both Enfield and Elmsdale District schools. While we acknowledge this is a good thing, we want to emphasize that this care will **NOT be provided on PD days, holidays, during school closures OR in the summer.** It does **not change our need for year-round care of our children or replace the day care spaces that are needed.** Additionally, given the waitlists at our local centres, these programs will **not begin to put a dent in the incredibly long waitlists in our local centres or meet the needs of our community.** To our knowledge these discussions have not materialized into any concrete action plans to date.

One of the biggest barriers that currently exists in our community, in particular, is that the majority of our current existing childcare facilities are for-profit (privately owned). The Canada Childcare Agreement states: "*As Nova Scotia transforms the current early learning and child care system, **we will be moving to a fully-not-for-profit model.** Currently 60% of centres are for-profit businesses. It will be important as we transform our early learning and care system, that we do not destabilize the sector to the point that families no longer have access to care in their community. Where federal funding is used to support new child care spaces in the province, **it must be used***

exclusively to fund new spaces operated by not-for-profit, public, and family-based child care providers. Nova Scotia understands that federal funds will not be used for new for-profit spaces." Our local daycares which already exist and have outstanding reputations in the community (Carmie's, Elmwood's 3 locations, East Hants Childcare, etc) are NOT permitted to expand and add more spaces. These privately owned centres are the backbone of our childcare community in East Hants and their hands are tied. Additionally, even if a community member wanted to open a childcare facility, they are not allowed due to the current Childcare Agreement. I understand there is a local community member who would like to open a centre and is unable to this reason.

One of the primary stated goals of the \$10 a day childcare program was to equalize the playing field for women in the workplace. To quote our current Liberal government "*We cannot let Canadian women and children get left behind.*" (follow this link for this quote and other information - [\\$10 a Day Child Care for Families | Liberal Party of Canada](#)). The reality is this agreement has all but obliterated a female-entrepreneur dominated industry. It has crushed female run small businesses and created less opportunity for future female entrepreneurs to pursue this business opportunity. Additionally, women are going to have more barriers to employment if we are unable to secure childcare due to the red tape and policy that prevents private industry from opening childcare businesses.

I encourage everyone to review the *Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement – 2021 to 2026* which we have referenced here - please follow this link [Canada – Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement - Canada.ca](#).

Clearly we need the Childcare Agreement to be amended. The *Nova Scotia Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement – 2021 to 2026* - does state "*9.1 This Agreement, including all attached annexes, may be amended at any time by mutual consent of the Parties. To be valid, any amendments shall be in writing and signed by Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development for the Province, and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development.*"

We have recently sent letters of concern and have met with John MacDonald, MLA and Kody Blois, MP to discuss the childcare issues in our province – and specifically in our community - and they have both stated they agree with our sentiments and will advocate for this change with their respective governments.

The New Brunswick Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement could be used as a guide to help us amend our current agreement. Their agreement even acknowledges the "*vital role of for-profit childcare centres*" stating "*New Brunswick's for-profit (designated) facilities were instrumental in keeping parents working during the early days of the pandemic where 70 of the 93 facilities serving essential workers were for-profit facilities.*" How quickly our government has forgotten this vital role. Additionally, the New Brunswick Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement states the following:

"New Brunswick is taking a multi-pronged approach to meet the objectives of increasing quality and to ensure the responsible management of public funds. To achieve this, New Brunswick will create an additional 3,400 new childcare spaces in the designated system over the 5 years of this Agreement, including 500 spaces in the first 2 years of this Agreement. In creating these spaces, New Brunswick commits that:

2,400 of these spaces will be created in not-for-profit and home-based childcare providers within the New Brunswick early learning facility designation

1,000 of these spaces will be created in for-profit childcare centers within the New Brunswick early learning facility designation". To view the entire *New Brunswick Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreement – 2021 to 2026* which was referenced here, please follow this link: <https://www.canada.ca/en/early-learning-child-care-agreement/agreements-provinces-territories/new-brunswick-canada-wide-2021.html>

You read correctly – this means 30% of the new spaces being created in New Brunswick can be through privately owned Childcare Facilities. To quote The Honourable Becky Druhan, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development for the province of Nova Scotia, whom we would need to request this amendment to: *"Child-care spaces are in high demand across the province, and we need to be innovative in how we make child care more accessible,"* (read the full article where this is referenced here: <https://news.novascotia.ca/en/2023/12/05/new-programs-increase-child-care-spaces>). It hardly seems reasonable to think that preventing people from opening daycares – and preventing existing centres from adding spaces - is part of a solution.

We want to highlight our purpose for reaching out to each of you.

Municipality of East Hants:

We recognize you are at no fault here – and we recognize you no control over the province and federal government's childcare plan. We still believe there is a role our municipality can play in supporting our community members. To quote our Warden, Elenor Rouston, *"We aim to stimulate a competitive economy that celebrates entrepreneurship, provides opportunity, creates jobs, and enhances the community's attractiveness in both our rural and urban areas"*. Lack of childcare is not only a social issue – it is an economic issue. The Municipality's Mission statement suggests *"East Hants cares about people and their quality of life. Through program and service excellence, we are building a strong, thriving community."* To have a strong and thriving community, **we need a place for our community members and business owners to send their children for care.** We need to be able to work, hire staff, and have our children in environments where they can learn and grow. To reference your *Strategic Plan and Organizational Values* (linked here: [Strategic Plan - Municipality of East Hants](#)):

· **Strong Community** - *Facilitate and advocate for the creation of community infrastructure and opportunities/ services that lead to a healthy, active and engaged community for all.*

Community Infrastructure **should include** childcare services. Otherwise we cannot be an engaged community.

· **Innovation** - *The organization encourages creative thinking and provides strong leadership that is receptive to new ideas.*

This one is the most important value you address, in our opinion. We feel our municipality has the capability and responsibility to be innovative in coming up with solutions to our community's childcare crisis. This is your community – you know it best. This is a crisis - that means it will need an 'all hands-on deck' approach to come up with a solution.

When considering the role the municipality could play some things come to mind:

We attended a meeting facilitated where Kim Ramsay, CAO of the municipality, and Elenor Rouston, Warden of the municipality, discussed the municipality looking to begin offloading some of the properties and structures owned by the municipality. Has any consideration gone into these municipality owned properties and buildings being used for childcare facilities – whether rented by a for-profit daycare (should the agreement be amended) or donated to a not-for-profit childcare centre? Providing locations for childcare organizations to operate would align with your statement *"The Municipality of East Hants recognizes the importance and value of not-for-profit community-based organizations. Council's primary role is an enabling, facilitative one, meant to develop and coordinate supports necessary to encourage vibrant, healthy and active communities."* I hardly see this being an unpopular decision from the public.

Perhaps we can leverage your programs like *The Community Partnership Fund* in conjunction with the provincial funding available to facilitate the development of a project/space like this.

With our MP, MLA and Municipality all on the same side, I truly feel we can make a difference here. We need to be innovative – we need to come together to achieve this.

Local For-Profit Childcare Centres:

We hear you, we value you. You are tired of fighting this fight. We are here to support you. Please keep fighting alongside us. We know we are late coming to the table, but we are here now.

Local Not-for-Profit Daycares:

We recognize the government is approaching you to build new spaces to help fulfill this childcare need. This is not an easy ask from our government – and not a fair burden to place solely on you. Setting up a not-for-profit organization like yours is a complex process – not something that can be rushed/done quickly. What we need is childcare spaces immediately – this cannot be achieved by the not-for-profit childcare organizations alone.

East Hants & Districts Chambers of Commerce:

As our advocates for the business community, we feel confident the childcare crisis does meet the criteria you have outlined in your 'Issue Filters' linked here: [Advocacy – East Hants & District Chamber of Commerce \(ehcc.ca\)](#) The issue checks all of your boxes:

- Does this issue fall within the mandate of the EHCC?
- Does the issue affect the wider business community?
- Does this issue affect a wider population?
- Is this an issue on which EHCC can have an impact given its available resources?
- Will action on this issue result in improving the region's or provincial competitive advantage?
- Will taking a position on this issue demonstrate leadership in the business community?
- Will taking a position improve the business climate for our members?"

Please help us advocate.

Local Not-for Profit/Community Supports organizations:

You provide support to our community members directly and understand the impacts of this crisis. Please help us advocate.

If you are reading this letter and are a business, parent, concerned community member, local agency supporting the community, or are part of the government representing our community, I encourage you to voice your concerns to The Honourable Becky Druhan, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development - info@beckydruhan.ca, to our local MLA at mlahantseast@gmail.com and local MP at Kody.Blois@parl.gc.ca and to our municipality at info@easthants.ca. To quote our Liberal Government's own website "The fact is, ensuring families have access to early learning and child care is not just a social issue—it is an urgent economic issue." ([\\$10 a Day Child Care for Families | Liberal Party of Canada](#))

We are a strong community and we can be the difference makers here.

Sincerely,

Andrea and Brad Ferguson