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Comments on the Discussion Paper Of the Children's and Community Department "Ontario Workforce Strategy; Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Strategy Funding " to the Emergency and Community Committee, May 16 2024.

Hamilton Child Care Advocates, a group of board members of child-care agencies, working to support the goals of the Canada -Wide Early Learning and Child Care project, respectfully offer the following:

Child care is an essential service for Hamilton. Accessibility to quality child care services improves work force participation and earnings, reduces poverty, and benefits the child's overall positive growth and development.

According to a the May 2024 paper of the Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance in "The Municipal Role in Child Care":

"In the next few years, child care is set to become one of the largest areas of municipal government expenditure in Ontario, rivalling roads, transit, wastewater, and policing. By 2026, funding to make child care more affordable and accessible – most of it managed and distributed by municipalities – will reach about \$5 billion annually in Ontario. The Financial Accountability Office of Ontario believes that an additional 227,000 child care spaces will be needed beyond what is planned for 2026, so \$5 billion is certainly not the final figure."

As long-term advocates for child care in Hamilton, we have appreciated how our Hamilton Children's Department has managed subsidies for children of low-income families, operational funding and wage enhancement grants, They have provided the funds to allow children with special needs to participate in children's programs, and made local plans in conjunction with school boards and other partners that reflect the special characteristics of our community. City Council has determined the development of child care that is attuned to local needs and preferences. We heartily support the local planning role that the Children's department has played and want to see it continue. We envisage a continued municipal role in child care planning, and Hamilton prioritizing child care as integral in its community planning in line with "Hamilton: the Best Place to Raise a Child".

However, the municipal role in child care, so valuable for local autonomy, does not appear to be supported by the present Ontario government. Municipal representation has not been included at the table when policy decisions are made, or their experience consulted for future child care development. Hamilton can no longer determine the number of child care subsidies available, in a community which has had high poverty levels, as the total number has been frozen provincially. Municipal discretion has been undermined in other ways, so that the City will not be able to use measures of quality to determine from which child care operators the City will purchase of child care services orders. A compulsory

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value for money audit of Red Hill Child Care centre has been ordered, when the quality of care, concern for children with special needs, and the properly remunerated work force are models for what child care of the future should look like. Above all, funding to municipalities for the administration of child care is being reduced, for Hamilton by about \$2.5 million, at a time when their role in planning of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) project is most needed. The downsizing of costs to municipalities is particularly concerning as

*property taxes will not rise as women's labour-force participation and GDP rise, but provincial and federal income taxes will. **Therefore, municipalities should not be expected to rely on the property tax base to share the costs of child care services with the provincial government ("The Municipal Role in Child Care").'***

Municipalities are being sidelined while the Ontario government has been doing a poor job of child care planning. It has not dealt with the work force crisis which impedes growth of child care services. Although there is some new enhanced funding for child care workers, mentioned in this City report, this will not be enough to attract and retain child care workers in the sector, as there is no wage grid, and pay continues around the level for secondary school graduates, rather than those with a two-year diploma. More provincial funding is required to meet demand for more child care. Capital funding is inadequate to build more non-profit and public spaces. Although equity is being used to prioritize child care expansion to low income, racialized, indigenous, francophone, new immigrant, and children with special needs, the needed extra funding for increased childcare subsidies and for children with special needs has not materialized.

The experience and knowledge of municipalities is vital if CWELCC is to be successful. Quebec has shown that it took 20 years to develop their child care system and access, so expansion, adequacy of funding and quality will continue to be issues. These are concerns with which municipalities are familiar. They need to continue to have decision making powers regarding the local allocation of child care funding and Ontario needs to accept the advice of municipalities, through an advisory committee.

In summary: we appreciate the past work of the Children's Department in the administration of local child-care, and we hope to see continued Hamilton Council support for local and integrated child care planning ; we believe the continued ability of municipalities to make local child- care decisions is important for higher quality in child-care provision; and we ask you to work with OMSSA to safeguard local municipal child care planning and to advocate for the establishment of a Municipal Advisory Committee to advise on child care matters to the provincial government ..

Respectfully submitted.

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