



Brief to The Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

Bill C-35, An Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada

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The Manitoba Child Care Association (MCCA) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization incorporated in 1974. We are proud to be the voice of early learning and child care (ELCC) in Manitoba, the largest provincial child care association, and an affiliate of the Canadian Child Care Federation. Our 4400+ members include licensed child care facilities, Early Childhood Educators and Child Care Assistants employed in licensed child care centres, Family Child Care Providers, students, and many associates who share an interest in high quality early learning and care. MCCA is entirely membership funded.

Our mission is to advocate for a quality system of child care, to advance early childhood education as a profession, and to provide services to our members.

MCCA's vision is to promote and support an exceptional early learning and child care system by fueling our members to be proud and excited to belong to a progressive, respected profession.

Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan and Bill C-35

MCCA enthusiastically applauds the introduction of Bill C-35, *an Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada* and fully supports the Government of Canada's commitment to working with provinces, territories, and Indigenous peoples to build an affordable, inclusive, flexible, and high-quality ELCC system for families across Canada. We are a committed partner in realizing the CWELCC and have already seen incredible possibilities of transformation in Manitoba.

One of the most significant learning outcomes of the global pandemic is that everyone relies on someone who relies on child care. The socioeconomic benefits of a high-quality child care program are innumerable and irrefutable. It supports families to go to work or to attend school. It provides choices for families. It offers children a safe and healthy environment where they can learn and develop emotionally, socially, cognitively, and physically. It sets the trajectory for life time positive social outcomes such as improved mental health, reduced addictions, poverty, crime rates and it supports healthy communities and promotes gender equity.

MCCA's Recommendations

1. Retain all amendments and changes made to date to Bill C-35 in the final legislation.
2. Add a definition of early learning and child care to strengthen and enshrine a licensed, regulated early learning and child care system in Canada.

Early Childhood Education Workforce

Early Childhood Educators must be prioritized. The success of building a high-quality early learning and child care system relies solely on Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). These are ECE professionals who are certified, valued and compensated fairly. In addition to increasing wages and benefits, improvements in the working conditions of ECEs are required to improve job satisfaction and morale, help reduce staff turn over and to encourage qualified staff to remain in the field. Manitoba's commitment to increase the supply of child care by 23,000 spaces will require approximately 5,000 additional staff and directors. With the current regulatory requirements for qualified staff, more than 3,000 will need to be certified as ECEs IIs or IIIs. There is already a shortage of ECEs to meet the regulatory requirements in centre-based programs in Manitoba. MCCA estimates about 30% of centres currently do not have enough certified ECEs to meet requirements.

MCCA believes there is an opportunity to reinforce the language within the Act to recognize the Government of Canada's leadership and role in supporting our essential ECE workforce. This could include principles for collaboration and sustained investments in a comprehensive national strategy which includes education, retention, recruitment and recognition of ECEs.

Accountability and public reporting

MCCA supports the commitment within the proposed Act of to enhance accountability through an annual federal public report on progress on the Canada-wide ELCC system. Key performance indicators such as children’s rights are necessary to measure the current system against desired outcomes and will allow for improved child care practice, policy and pedagogy.

MCCA further recommends that the Act specifies that there be Canadian-based ELCC research across a range of disciplines, methodologies and approaches. Meaningful efforts to address the lack of Canadian research in critical areas such as – non-profit child care in Canada, and ELCC for subpopulations such as immigrant children, children from minority language communities, and Indigenous children are critical to meeting the objectives of the CWELCC.

The priority of licensed, regulated, non-profit ELCC expansion, accountability, and oversight within Bill C-35.

Funding

MCCA supports the federal commitment to sustained and continued funding to ensure that child care is affordable, accessible, inclusive and high-quality across our country. We would further recommend that within Bill C-35, funding be described as annualized and tied to the licensed, regulated, not for profit system of child care, which includes centre-based and home-based facilities.

We would also welcome mechanisms to ensure child care remains predictable, sustainable, and sufficient in each province and territory based on the identified needs and objectives of agreements. Funding provided to operators must reflect the true costs of providing care that reflects the principles of the CWELCC plan and include appropriate inflationary increases as part of the funding formula.

National Advisory Council

MCCA supports the establishment of the National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care and enshrining this advisory body into law. We would welcome additional, ongoing, formal, and informal methods to ensure that federal policies, positions, and funding commitments related to the CWELCC plan are informed by the expertise and experiences of child care program providers like MCCA's members, as well as all levels of government.

Equity and Accessibility

MCCA supports statements and guiding principles within Bill C-35 that speak to equity, inclusion and accessibility as a priority for the Canada-wide early learning and child care system. Additionally, we support the acknowledgement that First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and families are best supported by early learning and child care programs and services that are culturally appropriate and that are led by Indigenous peoples.

Before and After School Support

Early learning is part of an integrated system with education and before-and after-school care programs. MCCA feels it is important to acknowledge that learning and development does not stop at age 6 and families need support managing the high cost of before-and-afterschool care for their older children. In Manitoba, there are over 14,000 licensed spaces that exist for children 6-12 years of age. This is an integral part of the regulated ELCC system.

Since signing its agreement in 2021, Manitoba has made great strides in building an affordable, accessible, inclusive, flexible and, critically, high-quality ELCC system. Advocates like MCCA, researchers and others have been calling for a national child care system for over 50 years. This system is going to take time to be developed if it is going to be successful and sustainable.

Submitted by, Manitoba Child Care Association

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