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**5 Minute Statement to the Senate Standing Committee on Bill C-35 – October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023.**

**Opening:**

Hello, thank you for the invitation to present today. My name is Jennifer Nangreaves and I am the Executive Director of the Early Childhood Development Association (ECDA) of Prince Edward Island. I am here representing our Board of Directors and we represent over 800 members which represents over 90% of the Early Childhood Educator workforce on PEI. We are a provincial, non-profit organization committed to promoting and supporting quality early childhood development programs and services for our Island's children and families.

I am honored to be joining you today on the traditional and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people of Epekwitk, meaning "lying in the water".

On behalf of the ECDA, I want to begin by thanking each of you on committee for your work on studying this legislation. Our members are monitoring this process with keen interest as it is truly their life's passion and livelihood, and we collectively thank you for your time that undoubtedly will go down in history in our profession.

The position of the ECDA is we are absolutely in support of Bill C-35.

The importance of having Federal commitment to the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care system, no matter the government in power in the future, will allow for true system building across the country. Having access to predictable, appropriate and sustained funding instead of what we have been doing in the past with grants here and there, will provide stability and predictability that will allow for strategic and long-term investments so that provinces, territories, and indigenous peoples, can reach their goals in achieving a high quality, accessible and affordable early learning and child care system.

The ECDA was pleased to see the Bill support the Human Rights Convention- The Rights of the Child and Rights of Indigenous People's Act. We believe, as has been mentioned throughout, that early learning and child care should not be a luxury, and that every child has a right to the very best start in their life.

Early Childhood professionals are well educated and immersed in the importance of the early years and in particular the first five years of life. A Canada wide system must support the establishment of a system which is delivered by highly educated, well-paid educators, delivered where families require access in high quality regulated and licensed early learning and child care centers, which provide rich learning experiences for all children. Quality matters, research suggests that poor quality early learning and child care can have a negative impact, in particular for children, who are most vulnerable. This could have an impact into their adolescent and adult

life. This is why children attending a high-quality early learning and child care center is just as important to us, as it is to families being able to go to work and contribute to the economy-- it's a win win.

It takes well-educated Early Childhood professionals to provide high quality and developmentally appropriate experiences for children of all abilities, provide families early intervention for exceptional needs, and assist children in their social and emotional learning as part of the foundation that will carry them through their life. Because of this, the ECDA was pleased to see the commitment to our workforce. We know that expansion is necessary as we have island families who have been on wait lists, but this process must be strategic and without qualified Early Childhood Educators, we would have empty early learning and child care spaces.

With the pressure of expansion, it is important to understand quality. Quality in an early learning and child care centre has many components, it is not just one thing: It's People, Place and Practice. The people, the educators, the Place, the children and educator's physical environment, and the Practice, the education of the educator – People, Place, Practice. Quality cannot be linear, and it must meet the family's needs, the educator's needs, and the child's needs.

All providers believe they offer quality, but when investing public tax dollars, there must be quality assurance that children and families are receiving safe and quality care and education.

The ECDA supports publicly managed centres to ensure the highest quality for children and families.

In Prince Edward Island 90% of the licensed centres are part of a publicly managed system of high-quality early learning and child care. As a part of this system, operators have agreed to a partnership with the Provincial Government to achieve a higher standard of quality: for example, have all trained staff, follow the Provincial Early Learning Framework, provide infant care, accept children with exceptional needs, provide healthy meals, establish a Family Advisory Committee, etc. The publicly managed system must also operate with the Provincial regulated family fees, as well as the Provincial wage grid for employees within the publicly managed system. There is also support from a Provincial Resource Team that supports Centre operators and educators in the delivery of the Curriculum Framework and the establishment of a quality early learning environment. This system was established over a decade ago and built upon as the investments grew from the Provincial government, and most recently from the Federal government. It is important to note that this commitment in PEI, was started by a Liberal Government and continued by a Conservative government, demonstrating that regardless of the stripe, a commitment to early learning and child care is a sound investment.

To highlight initiatives that PEI has seen success with so far due to the Canada Wide Agreement, which was signed in July 2021. Twice now, we have had family fees lowered significantly and

wages increased on our provincial early childhood educator wage grid, both on the same day.

These were days to celebrate for both children and families.

Most recently, the ECDA was pleased to be a part of an announcement on a Defined Contribution Pension Plan for employees working in the publicly managed system that will be matched 4% by funding made possible through the Canada Wide Agreement.. when presenting to local high schools, and the public at large. We were presenting to a grade 10 class last Spring actually, and a young student asked me if we had a retirement plan – I certainly was not thinking this when I was in grade 10, but these are considerations that young people are thinking about when deciding their career path.

Supporting the Early Childhood Educator workforce is not always about wages though, it is also our working conditions. Something that the ECDA advocated on behalf of members was for an extra position funded to provide pedagogical support above ratio requirements. The feedback we have heard from educators about this added support has meant more meaningful time scaffolding experiences for children and saved many from burning out.

These initiatives have notably retained educators who were considering another career opportunity and will undoubtedly be used as a recruitment incentive.

Lastly, the ECDA is supportive of the National Advisory Council because we understand that each province and territory have a different starting off point, different community needs, etc. and there needs to be perspective from all sides of this very important work. We hope that

through these provincial and territorial conversations, it will make our Canada Wide system stronger as we build upon the strengths all provinces and territories.

**Closing:**

Imagine a world where every child and family has access to high quality early learning and child care in their community, guided by expert early childhood educators who are valued for their critical work. This dreamy goal will not only empower our children and families to flourish, but it will also pave the way to a brighter future for generations to come.

Providing access to high-quality early learning and child care means not only creating a safe and nurturing environment for children to learn and grow, but also ensuring that early childhood educators are well-trained and recognized for their important work. Investing in early childhood education has both short-term and long-term benefits for society as a whole. By supporting the development of young children, we can help to build a stronger, healthier, and more prosperous future for everyone.

Let's take up this collective responsibility and ensure that every child has the resources and support they need to soar high. By working together towards a more equitable and inclusive society, we can guarantee that future generations can continue to benefit from the positive impacts of early learning and child care.

Thank you once again for the invitation to speak with you today and your very important work on this legislation.