



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

Prepared for the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

Thank You for your commitment to families and children by establishing the multilateral framework for a universally accessible, affordable, high-quality, publicly funded child care system as outlined in Bill C-35.

This historic piece of legislation represents a significant step towards a more inclusive and supportive society for Canadian families. We are particularly excited by the transformation of the current child care market to a system of universal early learning and child care, for all families, including those who are Indigenous.

The Dollywood Foundation of Canada is pleased to contribute to the Social Affairs, Science and Technology Committee regarding a potential enhancement to further enrich the early childhood experience of children across the nation.

Evidence-based research has demonstrated that early access to books is crucial to developing the early literacy skills needed for success in school, work, and life. We agree that helping young children develop a strong foundation for literacy skills is beneficial to the health and well-being of Canadians, and can accomplish this by integrating home book gifting into the child care system to provide a universal "early learning" resource.

Introduction to The Dollywood Foundation of Canada

The Dollywood Foundation of Canada was established in 2006 as a charitable non-profit organization by Dolly Parton with the simple mission to inspire a love of reading and books. Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is the flagship program and over the last 28 years has become the preeminent early childhood book-gifting program in the world by gifting over 200 million free books in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, The Republic of Ireland and Canada.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library home gifting model is a simply designed, community-based, turnkey program that mails free high-quality, age-appropriate books to children from birth until age five, no matter the family income.



Subtle yet ingenious—free to the family, Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library gets children excited about owning books, by having books mailed directly to their homes, inspiring shared family reading. The program reaches children in rural, remote, and suburban communities across all provinces and territories, delivering over three million free books in Canada since 2006.

This early learning program is high quality, accessible, inclusive, and would be a valuable complementary program to fulfill the “early learning” commitment in Bill C-35, as it provides a turnkey, affordable early childhood educational resource. High quality books are selected by early childhood educators/experts and represent Canadian themes, authors, and illustrators, many of which are Indigenous authors with First Nations, Inuit, and Metis representation.

Impact

The program’s impact has been widely researched, and results demonstrate its positive impact on early childhood development and literacy skills:

- Reading three times a week jumped from 60 to 85%
- Daily reading doubled from 29 to 59%
- 29% increase in children ready for Kindergarten
- Significantly stronger reading skills and higher scores on math, science and reading achievement tests over their non-participating peers, consistently from Kindergarten through 9th Grade.
- Established reading routines bring about increased stability, emotional well-being, and improved family atmosphere which strengthens families.
- A healing effect in the community manifesting in emerging neighborhood literacy initiatives, increased library usage, and connection to adult/dual language reading and literacy programs.
- Becomes a catalyst for connection to other community family services.



Recommendation for Canada-Wide Book Gifting Program

Integration of home book gifting program as an early learning resource into the child care framework and policy.

Families register children online and receive the gift of a monthly book, at their home, at no cost to the family. Monthly book selections are also sent to child care facilities and Family Resource Centres. Blending and tying home reading and home literacy into the child care setting while providing high quality books for child care facilities.

The Dollywood Foundation of Canada covers overhead, and administrative costs associated with making the program available. This keeps program costs down to reduced book and mailing expenses.

The inclusion of a book gifting program as an integral component of Bill C-35 would provide age-appropriate books to [every child under the age of five in Canada](#), with special emphasis on infants under one year old who may not yet be enrolled in formal early learning settings, resident newcomers and the most vulnerable children especially those from underserved or hard-to-reach backgrounds.

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is a Direct Service Program that supports early learning, strengthens the home environment, and supports children's optimal development.

- Affordable
- Scalable
- Reaches rural and geographically isolated communities
- Standalone program or in companionship with other early childhood initiatives
- Inclusive
- Logic Model/Evidence Based

Conclusion

We express our full support for Bill C-35 and its vision for a system of universal early learning and child care Canada-wide for all families and children. Thank you for your dedication to the well-being and prosperity of Canadian families. We look forward to witnessing the positive impact that Bill C-35 will have on generations to come!