



October 20, 2023 - J.Kehl responses to consideration of Bill C-35.

Senator Osler: Thanks, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for appearing today. We have heard concerns about child care operators using public funding through the Canada-wide agreements to drive for-profit care or to build profit-driven care. I will direct my question first to Ms. Kehl and then Ms. Bertrand and then Ms. Nangreaves.

How should the bill address the specific challenges faced by child care operators in rural and remote regions where economies of scale might not be achievable, potentially leading to profit-driven practices?

J. Kehl response: I would echo the comments that Ms. Friendly shared in the first panel. We know that under the Canada-wide agreement the expansion is for not-for-profit public. I speak to the experiences in Manitoba where we have a primarily not-for-profit system in our province. Ninety-five per cent of existing licensed facilities are of this delivery model. What we know, and the evidence has shown, is that high quality is often connected with the type of business model — **internet failed here

The challenges of accessibility are certainly amplified in rural regions. However, as evidence has shown, there are clear connections between high quality child care and the not-for-profit delivery model. Public investments into funding that directly supports programs and services result in removing a market-based approach, reduction of competition, allows government oversight into establishing regulations, quality targets and guidelines. The evidence is clear that staff turnover is reduced as Early Childhood Educators are certified, participate in ongoing professional development and are remunerated more adequately.

In our goal to build this high-quality system in Canada, we must be prudent to do so with this in mind. The system will be successful and sustainable if ensure that sufficient public investment is available to support all facilities in all parts of Canada. All children and families throughout the country deserve this. It will take careful public planning to identify where in rural regions the needs are greatest/ I would concur with Ms. Friendly's comments from Panel one, this type of public oversight will result in an equitable manner in which to distribute high quality child care across Canada.

Senator Moodie: Thank you, Madam Chair. My question is around regulation and licensure. We know that regulation and licensure is currently written in at the level of the agreements for all the agreements. In your opinion, and this is to all of you, considering the concern about

federal legislation intervening into provincial jurisdiction, is it essential that this requirement for regulation and licensure be included in this legislation, as well as a definition?

J. Kehl response: Yes, MCCA believes that it is essential for regulation, licensure and a definition be included in the legislation. This will ensure that the national legislation is strong and effective and ultimately will protect the public investment into the Early Learning and Child Care System. While acknowledging the provincial and territorial jurisdiction over child care, the Government of Canada has an opportunity to provide leadership by establishing a definition which would help to enshrine the Act into legislation.

The “care of a child” can have many connotations and implications. The inclusion of wording which includes “regulation and licensing delivered primarily by educated Early Childhood Educators with post secondary education” will delineate what is meant by high-quality licensed child care.

Senator McPhedran: I’d like to go back to my earlier question to the previous panel in terms of a potential amendment that would be a definition. I hope that you heard the discussion. I don’t need to repeat all of it.

From your understanding, is there consensus among those of you who are such strong advocates for this bill of the wording of the definition?

I referenced some particular wording from Martha Friendly. I know that in Morna Ballantyne’s paper there is also another definition. I’m really seeking some sense of consensus among those of you who are such powerful advocates.

J. Kehl response: Yes, I agree that there have been a few proposed suggestions on a definition. I believe that there is consensus from advocates, researchers and others on the primary principles to be included in a definition. If it would be supportive to the Senate, perhaps a unified definition be presented for consideration? As stated earlier, MCCA is in support of a definition to distinguish what regulated, licensed high-quality child care is. This would align and reinforce the principles within the agreements.

Senator Cardozo: Thank you to all three of our presenters today. You’ve provided us with a lot of interesting information.

I want to say hello to Jane Bertrand, whom I have had the good fortune of working with over the years in my previous role at the Pearson Centre. I want to thank you, Ms. Bertrand, and the Honourable Margaret McCain for the many years of work she has done through her foundation on this important issue.

I want to ask both of you: In terms of making any amendments to the bill — you might have seen I asked the same question to the previous panel — there is always the conundrum of whether we improve the bill and run the risk of delaying it or pass it in its current form just so that we get it across the finish line as soon as possible.

What is your advice to us? Are the changes you would like to see important enough that we must do it? As Senator Dasko pointed out, this committee is able to do both things sometimes — make amendments and get it through — but in case that weren't to happen, what would you advise us?

J. Kehl response: I think that we, as advocates, would agree that we are anxious for the Bill to be passed. There appears to be some consistency from the recommendations I have heard and read from both the panels today as well as within the briefs presented to HUMA earlier this year — definition of early learning and child care, strengthening the language around not for profit and public delivery, and perhaps some national lead on workforce.

I don't believe any of us want to rush this process but also do not want this Bill being delayed. It feels like we have been holding our breaths (for almost 50 years) and we are now so very close to the finish line. It's time to cross the line!

Senator Cardozo: Please do. That would be very helpful.

I have one general question to both of you, just to take us back to first principles.

We have all these agreements in place with the provinces and territories. What is your one-sentence or two-sentence reason for why we need the act now?

J. Kehl response: Advocates like MCCA have been calling for a national child care system for over 5 decades. We have already seen across Canada the tremendously positive impacts that the Canada-wide ELCC plan is having for children, families, for women and for Early Childhood Educators. High-quality child care supports us all. Everyone relies on someone who relies on child care. The time is now.

Senator Seidman: This is related to the question Senator Omidvar just asked. If I look at data put out from StatsCan on October 5, 2023, proportion of children younger than six participating in any form of child care by province in the years 2019, 2020 and 2022, it's an interesting trend to see that the numbers have gone down over time instead of going up, and by fairly high proportions. In Prince Edward Island, the number has gone down by 8% in three years.

We could think about why this could be happening, COVID, for example, but I'm just wondering if there is something else going on and is it that places are announced but there's no staff, no way to fill obligations to provide child care and that's why they're going empty and there are fewer children in child care.

Ms. Nangreaves, since you are getting the questions about P.E.I. today, could I ask you about that, if you have some understanding of the situation?

The Chair: I am disappointed that we were not able to hear Ms. Kehl on both these local and broader questions. I suggest the question is for you as well, Ms. Kehl, so whatever you can do to help us with your point of view from Manitoba would be helpful.

J. Kehl response: I am perplexed a bit by the declining number of children under six years of age in licensed early learning and child care. In looking at the Manitoba's Annual reports, we are certainly seeing an increase in the number of spaces available for families. Since the introduction of \$10/day child care in our province, MCCA has heard from its members that wait lists have increased significantly. Many facilities have closed their lists due to the long wait times.

However, we can also deduct from the Annual Reports that there is a shortage of ECEs in Manitoba in the current system. I think that there are potentially a few things happening – families may have found alternative, temporary solutions for child care as a result of the pandemic, but the key word would be temporary. Alternatively, facilities are not able to hire the proportion of trained ECEs to meet regulatory ratios and are forced to leave spaces open.

It would be interesting to know if there is some fault in the data collection.

Thank you for allowing me to submit my responses in writing.