



## Leading the Fight to Reinstate 2017 Funding For the Child Care Occupancy Grant

By: Cesar Palacio

The City of Toronto staff's proposal to end the 20 year "**Child Care Occupancy Grant**" payable to Public, Catholic and French School Boards, will affect most daycares in the City of Toronto, including Ward 17-Davenport.

There is no question that the City's proposal to no longer fund this subsidy would affect low-income and middle-income families alike –who are struggling to make ends meet. It is crucial to maintain the Child Care Occupancy Grant for the current year until the province tables a more equitable funding formula. In my opinion, the occupancy grant is helping offset costs pertaining to lighting, heating, maintenance and rent for 350 child care centres in Toronto. These are costs that providers will, no doubt, pass onto low income families.

The reality is that families, on average, are spending a disproportionate amount of their net income on child care. The costs for obtaining affordable, accessible and quality child care has become totally unaffordable, it is unconscionable to think that in many cases – child care costs exceed mortgage payments, or university tuition. It is sad, when hard working families with small children face the dilemma of quitting their jobs because they can no longer afford the cost of child care.

Fighting for affordable child care is everybody's business. I hope all levels of government step-up to the challenge, after all –there is only one taxpayer; meaning budget cuts to the most vulnerable, or middle class –don't save money –it just transfers the costs to social services as more people will become reliant on social services, or unemployed.

At the local level, Ward 17-Davenport has gentrified tremendously with thousands of new young families. As a result, the demand for daycare services has increased. Taking this into consideration, I have been working closely with City staff from Children Services and MPP Cristina Martins to create additional affordable child care spaces at the Carleton Village Early Learning Centre, Fairbank Memorial Daycare Centre, General Mercer Early Learning Centre and the Ascot Community Daycare at Oakwood Collegiate, just to name a few. In Ward 17-Davenport the majority of day care centres rely on this important grant to conduct their day-to-day operations.

Furthermore, some of these daycares are located in the Weston-Pelham community –a **Neighbourhood Improvement Area (NIA)**. The NIA is part of the City's "Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020 (TSNS 2020)", which works as part of a larger City strategy to build stronger neighbourhoods in Toronto that are currently falling below

the Neighbourhood Equity Score - the objective is to provide an equitable set of social, economic and cultural opportunities for all residents, with the goal of advancing equitable outcomes across all neighbourhoods. According to the 2011 Neighbourhood Demographic Estimates, the Weston-Pelham NIA has a 21% population living in low-income with an average household income of \$34,000-\$35,000. With the rising costs of daycare fees those marginalized families in this income bracket will still find it most difficult to afford such increases, even with subsidies.

### **The lack of Child Care subsidies is critical:**

A review of the Province's current Board of Education occupancy funding model is expected to be released by the Province as part of Phase 3 of the Children Care and Early Year Act in 2017. The City of Toronto has requested that the Minister of Education improve the funding formula to include the occupancy cost of early learning and child care space in schools.

I remain hopeful that all levels of government including School Boards will eventually assume responsibility for this much-needed subsidy. On a positive note, City Council is recommending, in this Operating Budget, an additional 300 subsidies for infants, toddlers and school aged children - this is good news, **but not good enough** when the City of Toronto has more than 18,000 families on the waitlist for subsidies. On the other hand, the province announced the creation of an additional 100,000 child care spaces throughout Ontario, however, without subsidies the **social inequity** will continue and child care spaces will remain underutilized, therefore, it is critical that all levels of government work together and create an accessible and affordable daycare system that **leaves no one behind**.

### **What Torontonians Expect from City Council:**

Torontonians want us to find efficiencies, while protecting social programs that enhance the livelihood of our communities. These are difficult, yet critical decisions that we have to make. We owe it to families to continue advocating for affordable quality child care. As we move forward, we must continue working towards a funding model that will help Toronto address the challenges child care service providers face now and in the future. Affordable daycare, I believe, is one of the best investments our Governments can make for our children.

### **How you can help:**

Please contact your respective City Councillor in your area or Member of Provincial Parliament to voice your concerns. Personally, I will continue to lead the charge at City Council to reinstate the 2017 funding for the Child Occupancy Grant until the Province comes up with an improved Child Care funding formula later this year.