

Subject: Advocacy Item – Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan**APPROVALS:****Jamie Doyle**_____
Director_____
Chief Administrative Officer**Recommended Motion:**

THAT the Mayor be authorized on behalf of Council, to send a letter to the Government of Alberta Minister of Children's Services and local MLA's urging the Government of Alberta to reinstate the Northern Grant Allowance for childcare workers immediately and to participate in the federal universal child care program (Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan).

Summary:

Child care and early years supports have been through significant changes and challenges over the last few years that have negatively impacted the affordability for families and may lead to concerning economic repercussions, particularly for women participating in the labour force. Administration has worked with the Early Years Coalition (EYC) to develop awareness tools on the impacts of these changes to the local child care sector and have highlighted the local concerns to the Government of Alberta through the Inter-City Forum on Social Policy in May 2021. Administration will also be presenting this issue alongside the EYC for the 2021-2024 Council for their attention and action. To date there has been little response from the Government of Alberta to address the concerns brought forward. Without immediate attention to the situation of child care locally, further child care centre closures are expected.

Background:

The Government of Alberta discontinued \$25/day child care programs in March 2021 which has impacted four local child care centres. These centres saw an increase of 200% or more in their fees, making child care unaffordable for many families. The province also eliminated the Northern Grant Allowance (a cost of living allowance) and Staff Attraction Incentive program as of June 2020, resulting in a decrease of 33% to child care worker salaries (amounting to a base pay of \$16.50). Without the Northern Grant Allowance, child care centres in the region are unable to recruit and retain sufficient child care workers. Since February 2020 there has been a 50% decrease in the number of child care workers in the sector.

These changes have resulted in two licensed child care centres closing with further closures anticipated before the end of 2021. Licensed child care in the region is increasingly unaffordable for many families and an inability to attract and retain qualified child care workers will further reduce the number of spaces that centres can offer. Child care is a key building block of a thriving economy and without affordable child care options for families, the local economy will suffer. Studies indicate that for every dollar spent on early child care education, the broader economy receives between \$1.50 and \$2.80 in return.

Rationale for Recommendation:

Affordable child care is a key building block of a thriving local economy and recent changes to provincial child care policies have negatively impacted the affordability of child care in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo.

Strategic Priorities:

Responsible Government

Attachments:

1. State of Child Care in the RMWB- Summary