

CHILD CARE MODERNIZATION ACT, 2013

Mrs. Sandals moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 143, An Act to enact the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2013, to repeal the Day Nurseries Act, to amend the Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007 and the Education Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'll make my statement during ministerial statements, Speaker.

CHILD CARE

Hon. Liz Sandals: Child care is a key part of the early years system, and it plays a critical role for Ontario's families, communities and the economy. Today, I am pleased to introduce the Child Care Modernization Act, which you will be relieved to know is what we're going to call it, rather than the 10-line-long title that's the legal title.

The Child Care Modernization Act, if passed, will modernize and build a high-quality child care and early years system that is more responsive to parents, and children's needs.

Our government has already taken a number of steps in this area. For example, last year we implemented a new child care funding formula that is based on current demographics and population trends. We've developed an early years policy framework that provides a vision and strategic direction for programs and services for children up to six years of age. And we're implementing full-day kindergarten, which will serve approximately 265,000 children annually by next fall.

While we've made improvements to the current early years system, the legislation that regulates the child care sector hasn't changed fundamentally since the 1980s. But the world around us has changed. That is why we are taking the next steps to repeal and replace the old Day Nurseries Act.

The proposed legislation I am introducing today would help transform the child care and early years system to better meet the needs of the parents who use and rely on the system and the children who are placed in its care.

The current legislation that governs child care, the Day Nurseries Act, was enacted in 1946 and has not been comprehensively updated since 30 years ago, in 1983. It does not reflect the current needs of our children and parents, which is why we need to take action.

The proposed legislation would not only enhance safety but also foster the learning, development, health and well-being of Ontario's children.

If passed, the Child Care Modernization Act would provide the government with greater enforcement tools, including the authority to issue administrative penalties of up to \$100,000 per infraction by a provider. It would also increase the maximum penalty for a successful prosecution of offences in the courts from the current \$2,000 to \$250,000.

It would also increase access to spaces in licensed home child care settings by increasing the number of children that licensed home child care providers can care for, from five to six. If all current licensed home child care providers took on one additional space, they would create approximately 6,000 new child care spaces in Ontario.

The act would also clarify what programs or activities are exempt from requiring a licence, including care provided by relatives, babysitting, nannies, and camps that provide programs for school-age children.

It would also remove the current exemption that allows some private schools to care for more than five children under the age of four without a licence.

The act would also amend the Education Act to meet our commitment to offer before- and after-school programs for six- to 12-year-olds, where there is sufficient demand by parents. Programs could be delivered directly by boards, by third-party child care providers, or by authorized recreation providers.

Ontario is already a leader in publicly funded education, having made great progress in student achievement. This legislation would, if passed, build on our progress and position Ontario to become a future leader in child care and early years services.

Speaker, the proposed legislation establishes a foundation for a more responsive, high-quality and accessible child care and early years system for children and families in Ontario. This new legislation is an essential next step in modernizing our child care sector, and the next step to a better future for Ontario's children.

I look forward to having every member of this House support this very important bill.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Rob Leone: The safety of our children is one of our number one concerns in the PC caucus. I want to thank the minister for bringing forward legislation that will ensure that children's safety is a primary concern, but I have to say that she's late to the game.

The reality is that the minister was either unaware or didn't really care about the concerns that were raised earlier this summer about the limitations of her child care policy. Five months later, we finally have a piece of legislation to deal with these concerns.

The ministry failed to answer 25 of 448 complaints made about unlicensed day cares between January 1, 2012, and July 12, 2013, by the minister's own admission. She failed to follow up with site visits for 24 complaints—18 of which were in Barrie, which includes Vaughan; two in London; and four in Ottawa—until this year.

We're thankful that the minister has finally brought forward some legislation to deal with these matters, but we're very concerned about the time it has taken to do that.

CHILD CARE

Miss Monique Taylor: I'm pleased to rise today and say that I welcome the introduction of the Child Care Modernization Act. I welcome the fact that the government is finally taking some action to ensure better protection of our children in all daycare settings. However, it's shameful that it took the tragic and unnecessary deaths of Ontario children before the government finally moved to provide better oversight.

This is an extensive bill, and it is one that we will need to look at very closely. We have a general overview, but we know that the devil is always in the details. New Democrats want to see prompt debate on this bill, and we want to see extensive hearings at committee, to make sure that we're finally getting it right.

Existing problems in the child care sector just don't require new legislation; they require commitment to action. This government must act on each and every complaint received about child care in Ontario, and they must ensure that there are enough inspectors to do the job. New legislation won't save lives if complaints continue to be ignored.

I also look forward to the forthcoming recommendations from the Ombudsman on this matter. I hope that those recommendations, along with a thorough review of the new legislation, can be used to improve child care in Ontario