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Chair: Mr. Robert Morrissey

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 62 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

The clerk has advised me that sound for everybody appearing virtually has been tested and we're good to go.

Again, today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person and virtually.

Before you speak, I ask you to wait until I recognize you by name. For those appearing virtually, please use the “raise hand” icon to get my attention.

You have the option of speaking in the official language of your choice. If you're appearing virtually, you'll see the icon at the bottom of your surface. Those in the room can use the earpiece. Translation services are provided.

I remind all members to speak slowly for the benefit of the interpreters so that they can understand. If there's a loss of interpretation, please signal me to get my attention. We will suspend while the situation is being clarified.

I would also like to remind you that screenshots or shots in the room are not allowed during committee meetings.

Bill C-35 is an act respecting early learning and child care in Canada. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Friday, February 3, 2023, the committee will continue its study of Bill C-35.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for their opening five-minute statements. I ask that you recognize the five-minute period.

From the Child Care Providers Resource Network is Julie Bisnath, program coordinator.

[Translation]

We will be hearing Mr. Alain Dupuis, Executive Director of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, as well as Mr. Jean-Luc Racine, a representative.

[English]

From the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon, we have Marilou Denault, senior adviser, who is appearing virtually; and Dr. Christa Japel, representative.

We will begin with Madam Bisnath for five minutes, please.

Madam, you have the floor.

Ms. Julie Bisnath (Program Coordinator, Child Care Providers Resource Network): Hello. Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for this opportunity.

The Child Care Providers Resource Network is committed to the well-being and safety of all children. We are a non-profit charitable organization with a mission to provide information, training, resources and support to those providing child care in a home setting.

For us, child care is the care of a child regardless of who provides the care—parents, grandparents, friends, relatives, in-home nannies or home child care providers, whether licensed or unlicensed, both of which are legal.

CCPRN was pleased to see that the government introduced a national child care strategy, but we feel that the Canada-wide early learning and child care plan is not nearly as inclusive as it could be. Like those who share our perspective, we advocate equitable access, quality child care and parental choice.

To meet the current and expanding demand, Canadian families need all forms of child care to be affordable and accessible. Limiting parental choice to one type of care conflicts with the notion of a universal plan and hinders access. To improve access, the plan must acknowledge home child care, both licensed and unlicensed, as a valuable component of the child care system. Not only does home child care impact expansion, as it is faster and less costly to open, but it also meets the unique needs of Canadian families by allowing them to choose a caregiver with similar values, a shared language or a shared culture. In partnership with their caregiver, a strong bond is established, resulting in a mutually cohesive relationship focused on the needs of the child. We know that family engagement is essential to each child's development.

Home child care also offers flexible hours beyond the traditional nine-to-five model and a continuity of care with one primary caregiver, a feature not available in larger centres. These low-ratio, authentic and nurturing environments are found in communities both urban and rural across Canada.

Championing home child care as a central part of CWELCC would increase access to a diverse array of child care options. It would also support women entrepreneurs, including newcomers to Canada and racialized women. Home child care honours the experiences and unique qualities of these caregivers, many of them early childhood educators, who provide an essential service in their communities, enriching the lives of young children.

With less than 25% of children accessing licensed child care, CWELCC excludes more than 75% of Ontario children and families, including those choosing unlicensed home child care or an in-home nanny, those choosing informal care arrangements with a friend or relative and those choosing to stay at home with their own young children.

CCPRN believes that parents are competent and are capable of making child care choices best suited to meet their child's and their family's needs. Even within the licensed system in Ontario, home child care providers are unable to obtain their own licence. Instead, they are obligated to work under the umbrella of an agency licensed by the Ministry of Education. An option for direct licensing would have an immediate impact on available spaces, allowing greater access for families.

Incidentally, the collaboration between licensed and unlicensed home child care is not a new concept. Several years ago, CCPRN and the Canadian Child Care Federation worked together to develop and deliver a national home child care training program. There are many opportunities for the government to work with all sectors of child care, but by focusing on one preferred form of care, CWELCC promotes inequitable access and allows for the erosion of parental choice. An equity-based lens must be applied, recognizing that not all families or children in Canada are the same. Choice in child care, along with income-based testing, would pave the way for more inclusive and more equitable access.

CWELCC funding agreements need to be flexible and inclusive. Allowing the provinces to transfer funds directly to parents is the most effective and efficient way to achieve these goals. Reducing administrative overhead leaves more money for reduced child care fees for all families, regardless of their choice in child care.

In closing, I would like to share the following two quotes from parents who have chosen home child care. The first is from Dr. Lisa Walker, a clinical neuropsychologist:

Quality in home day care is knowing that your child is in a setting where they have a caregiver who truly cares, who treats the child as they would their own, and who is invested in fostering the healthy development of the child. It is clear to parents when they have a caregiver who enjoys and takes pride in what they do. That passion is then reflected in how they interact with the child, the activities they plan, and the environment that they foster. Quality means parents have the peace of mind of knowing that their child is not only safe but valued. When I found Brenda, I knew that I had found a person with integrity who would provide my child with the kind of quality care I was seeking.

The second quote is from a parent survey:

I plan to stay with our current unlicensed home care provider because the quality of care our daughter receives there is far greater than the care she ever received at the licensed centre. I would love to have access to the reduced fees. Right now I feel as if I have to choose between the quality of care my daughter receives and a more affordable cost of care.

● (1540)

Thank you for your time today.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bisnath.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dupuis, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Alain Dupuis (Executive Director, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Thank you very much. Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon.

[*English*]

Thank you for having us.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for inviting the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne today to testify on Bill C-35 and to talk about the main issues linked to early childhood services in French. I am here with Jean-Luc Racine, who is the Executive Director of the Commission nationale des parents francophones, one of our Federation's member organizations.

We are testifying today on behalf of the 2.8 million Canadians who belong to francophone minority communities in nine provinces and three territories. More specifically, we will be speaking on behalf of the 141,000 thousand children aged four years or less, according to the last census, whose right to an education in French in a minority setting is guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom.

We are here to speak on behalf of the parents of these children, who often have to make wrenching decisions because of a woeful lack of spaces in francophone daycares. In certain places, like Prince Edward Island, you have to wait upwards of three years to get a space.

For too many parents, there comes a time when they can no longer wait. They may decide that one parent stays at home, which makes the family poorer and furthers inequality between men and women. What happens most often is that the parents have to enrol their child in an English-language daycare. They make that choice, which isn't exactly a choice, because they have no other options, and it is during the most crucial period for the development of their child, when they are acquiring a language and a sense of identity.

Even if both parents are francophones, there's a high likelihood that the child who goes to an English-language daycare is more at ease speaking in English than in French when he or she starts school. In many cases, in order for that child to succeed at school, he or she will have to pursue their schooling in English. Imagine the feeling of failure that francophone parents feel because they haven't been able to ensure that their child will grow up in French.

The lack of early childhood services in French is therefore a barrier to the exercise of the constitutional right to education in French in a minority setting. It is a contributing factor to assimilation and by the same token, it constitutes a threat to the future vitality of francophone minority communities.

As I have stated, there are 141,635 children who are entitled to an education in French in a minority setting. However, the number of authorized spaces in francophone daycares means that only 20% of those children will receive a space. That also means that in 80% of cases, and this goes for thousands of households across the country, parents are having difficult conversations to try and find a solution to the dilemma that I have just described to you.

I will now turn over to my colleague, Mr. Racine.

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine (Representative, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Why are we lacking early learning services in French? The Commission nationale des parents francophones has submitted a brief to the committee which lays out the problem and recommends some solutions. Basically, the problem lies with the agreements signed with the provinces and territories providing for a national child care program. These agreements do include language clauses, but the provincial and territorial action plans are vague and don't provide much of a framework for access to child care in French.

We are therefore seeing situations such as the one in Alberta, where only 19 out of 1,500 new child care spaces will go to the francophone community. In New Brunswick, the only officially bilingual province, only 300 spaces out of 1,900 will be set aside for francophones.

As it is currently drafted, Bill C-35 will worsen existing systemic inequalities. We know that that was not the intention of Parliament nor of the government. We know that you want what is best for our children. That is why we are counting on the committee's collective wisdom to make the seven amendments to the bill that we recommend in our brief.

Our three main requests are the following: recognizing official language minority communities in the preamble, the definitions and other parts of the bill; including in the funding guidelines specific provisions for the establishment and expansion of child care services in French in nine provinces and three territories, excluding

Quebec; and providing for representation of minority francophone communities on the national advisory council. These amendments will give a voice to francophones in all their diversity and ensure that francophones will be taken into account when decisions are made concerning early childhood services.

The federal budget that was tabled a few days ago explicitly recognizes that our two official languages are not on an equal footing and that the demographic weight of francophone minority communities is being eroded. Thanks to this bill, you, as parliamentarians, have the ability to change the situation for an entire generation of francophone children. It is vital that you seize the opportunity.

• (1545)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Racine.

[*English*]

Who is speaking for the foundation?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marilou Denault (Senior Advisor, Communications and Public Affairs, Observatoire des tout-petits, Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon): That's me, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Denault, you have the floor.

Ms. Marilou Denault: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the committee members for inviting me to take part in your study. I am Marilou Denault and I am the Senior Advisor for Communications and Public Affairs at the Observatoire des tout-petits. I am accompanied by Christa Japel, associate professor with the Département d'éducation et formation spécialisées of the Université du Québec à Montréal, who will be answering your questions along with myself.

Today, I will share with you the Observatoire's two biggest concerns about the current situation in Quebec, which highlight the importance of some of the bill's guiding principles. We believe it is essential to ensure the quality of services offered throughout the network by using quality standards that are scientifically recognized, and also to improve access to good quality child care services for the very young and the most vulnerable. I will now explain in more detail why these are concerns.

Our first concern is to ensure the quality of services offered. Studies show that child care services can have a beneficial impact on child development and help reduce gaps in development between children from more privileged backgrounds and those from lower-income backgrounds when they start school. However, in order to see that positive impact, child care services have to meet certain quality standards. Given the haste to create spaces in order to meet the needs of families, we would like to remind you of the importance of using recognized quality standards that have been documented in scientific literature.

Currently, two things could, in our opinion, threaten the quality of services that we offer very young children. Firstly, the required training for educators seems to have been reduced by measures that are meant to help ease staffing issues. I am referring to qualified temporary replacement staff, who only need to complete 25 of the 91 training units on childhood education techniques. And yet studies show that educators who are better trained are more sensitive to the needs of children interact more with them and provide better care and a variety of educational activities that are age appropriate.

There is also the issue of staff turnover, which has come out as one of the main concerns of parents in Quebec in a recent study done by the Institut de la statistique du Québec. Studies show that children who have been exposed to more frequent staff changes interact less with adults and will get lower scores in language skills tests.

Our second big concern is improving access to services for the most vulnerable children. We all know that many children are waiting for a space, indeed in Quebec alone 32,000 children are currently on waiting lists. We believe that some children are worthy of special attention, i.e., children from underprivileged backgrounds, children of immigrants and those that have special needs. These children are doubly vulnerable, because they are the ones who are living in conditions that are more difficult and would benefit more from quality child care services. Unfortunately in Quebec, these are the same children that often find themselves in daycares where the services are of lesser quality. These children and their families face geographical, financial, linguistic and administrative hurdles, to name a few. For example, services are sometimes not adapted to the needs of a handicapped child, or opening hours don't meet the needs of a parent who has an atypical schedule and works evenings and weekends. We believe it is essential to take these hurdles into account within existing daycares, but also for any new spaces that will be created.

We would also remind you that working within the community and with community organizations are proven strategies that allow us to better reach vulnerable families. These families have difficulty accessing child care spaces, which means their children change daycares often, which has an impact on the quality of the relationship that the children develop with the educators, the sought-after stability that is very important for a young child. Moreover, according to a survey done in Quebec, once these children reach school age, those who have been to three or more daycares are more likely to be vulnerable.

In conclusion, we hope that the challenges described today will be taken into account by the committee in its study on Bill C-35. I would like to finish by highlighting the need to invest in the development of nonprofit services over the next few years. The networks that will be set up by the provinces must also have quality indicators and provide proof of the efficiency of the strategies used to reach vulnerable families.

Thank you very much.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Denault.

[English]

We will now open the floor for questions. I will ask each member to please identify the person they're directing their questions to.

We'll begin with Ms. Ferreri for six minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of our witnesses who are here at HUMA to discuss Bill C-35. There's a lot to learn and a lot to take in and consider as we strengthen this bill and try to close the gaps.

I'll start with Ms. Bisnath.

I found your testimony quite interesting. I know there have been a lot of parents crying publicly, both metaphorically and literally, because they cannot access child care. They've likened getting a space in \$10-a-day child care to winning the lottery.

You talked a lot about the way the bill, as currently written, is non-inclusive. There are kind of winners and losers. That's perhaps an unintended consequence of the bill, but it's what's happening. If you don't have a spot, you just don't get access to child care. We've had multiple families sharing that they actually cannot go back to work. Women actually can't go back to work. It's actually hurting women more than it's helping women.

You spoke about women entrepreneurs, winners and losers, non-inclusivity and including everybody in the choice. One of the major push-backs I hear is concern that children are not for profit and that by opening up this bill to include everyone, people will profit from children.

Can you expand on that concern from some people in the sector?

Ms. Julie Bisnath: Thank you.

From our perspective, home child care providers who are independent or unlicensed and not part of a not-for-profit or licence system are not making a profit; they're earning a salary. It's two different things.

They're not bringing in so much money that it's a profit. They're self-employed. They're entrepreneurs. They're making a livable wage—a salary—doing work that is meaningful to them and to their community. They are providing services to the children in their areas and neighbourhoods. Yes, they are earning an income so that they can be self-sufficient, economically independent and support their own children and their own families.

In that sense, if we could find a way to include these home child care entrepreneurs, perhaps with direct licensing or some other mechanism, it would open access to so many families to be able to have a spot under the CWELCC plan.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I agree with you in what I've heard. Thank you for that.

I'm curious about what you know in terms of the wait-lists. Are there any that you know of that have people looking for child care who can't access it? When we look at the capacity, that seems to be a major consequence of this bill. It's increased demand when there were already wait-lists to start with.

• (1555)

Ms. Julie Bisnath: For the most part, that's out of our realm of experience. We don't really keep track of wait-lists for licensed child care, or for any child care.

I can say that I talk to parents regularly who are looking for child care, who are desperate for child care and who are looking at any avenue to find care that they need for the child. I see through social media and in talking with the public and with people in our network that they're searching months and months in advance and sometimes still cannot get a spot. Here in Ottawa and in other places across Ontario, access is very limited.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you for that.

If I may, I'll come back to your quote from, I believe, a neuroscientist—the doctor.

Ms. Julie Bisnath: Yes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: It was about the quality of care. I think that's one of the big concerns for people if we open it up or try to put forth an amendment to include more. Right now, it is an exclusive bill. Whether it's intended to be or not, it's just cutting out a lot of people.

How do you assure people that the child's welfare and safety, both physically and psychologically, will be a priority if you open it up to all child care providers and let parents choose what's best for their children?

Ms. Julie Bisnath: We feel that the home child care providers are accountable to the parents and to their communities. Parents know what kind of experience their child is having. We know that good quality and poor quality exists in all sectors, just as in all professions, and that a licence doesn't necessarily equal quality child care.

Quality is so much more than just a piece of paper or a checklist; it's the relationship that's formed between the parent and the provider. It's this partnership that's based on mutual respect and centres around the care of the child.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you for that.

Ms. Julie Bisnath: That's how we—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I see that I have 30 seconds left. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I believe it was Ms. Denault who was talking about stability for the child and having those multiple caregivers. You can see the cross-section here with what Ms. Bisnath is saying on these providers. You can see that there is the ability to have stability too, if you are investing and opening up that access.

As well, I want to touch on Jean-Luc and Alain. Thank you for your testimony as well. It was insightful, I think, to hear about the unintended consequences of the access to care.

Thanks to all of you for being here, and thank you for your advocacy for this bill.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Saks, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks (York Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses who are here with us today.

Mr. Racine, Mr. Dupuis, how important is it for francophone minority communities to have access to child care and early learning services in Canada, especially in French?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: It is absolutely crucial, in fact. The ability to be francophone and to continue to be francophone in all provinces and territories in Canada is contingent upon equal access to day-cares in French. We worked hard for the last generation in order to improve access to French-language schools throughout the country. We now have 740 French language schools in a minority setting and our rights are guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. However, in order that our young people may go to these schools, they have to live their first years in French and often, because of a lack of access, they can't do so. The first years of life are incredibly important for language development and French-language acquisition, so much so that if the children don't go to day-care in French, very often they will not go to school in French.

It is therefore crucial, and unfortunately right now, the bill does not specify that spaces in French must be guaranteed equitably in all provinces and territories. There are no guidelines to ensure that the funds transferred by the federal government will go to providing the necessary French-language child care spaces. Over 9,000 French language spaces are needed in the country. The bill provides a framework for this new program which has been hailed everywhere in the country, but it must be more specific as to objectives and funding obligations for French language daycares in the various provinces and territories. We also have to include the voice of minority francophones on the national advisory council in order to set the tone for all the policies that will follow this bill.

• (1600)

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you.

Mr. Racine, do you have something to add?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: Yes. We often hear about the assimilation of francophones. In fact, it begins in early childhood. I have heard from many people, including very recently from two francophone parents from New Brunswick who had to place their child in an English-language day care. Later, when they had their child tested by a specialist for a language development issue, they realized that it was not a developmental problem, because the child was doing very well in English, but was having a lot of trouble learning French.

That is why amendments to the bill that we are putting forward are necessary. The importance of day care services for francophone minority communities needs to be recognized. That must be included in the bill. The bill must also include everything relating specifically to funding, along with all the other clauses we are proposing.

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Thank you, Mr. Racine and Mr. Dupuis.

My first language is Hebrew, but is very difficult for my daughters to speak that language,

[English]

even though they were in a Hebrew school for early education, so I understand how important it is to maintain a culture and language.

[Translation]

For my part, French is my fourth language, so I apologize for my mistakes.

[English]

I'd like to switch, if I may, to Marilou Denault and Fondation Lucie.

Your organization's mission is to “prevent poverty by contributing to the creation of conditions conducive to the development of the full potential of all young people living in Quebec”.

Drawing on the experience of Quebec—of which we have 25 years to look at, which is really quite amazing—in planning out this nationwide, high-quality universal child care system, can you speak to how essential affordable, high-quality and inclusive child care is to the healthy development of young people? You did mention in your opening remarks the science and the evidence behind it.

I had the opportunity to meet with the team at Sainte-Justine earlier in the year and received a lot of evidence there, but I'd like to hear from Fondation Lucie if possible, from either Ms. Japel or Ms. Denault.

[Translation]

Ms. Marilou Denault: If I understand correctly, you would like to know what effect child care services have on preventing poverty and you are asking me whether, in Quebec, it has been noted that child care services have had that effect. Is that correct?

Ms. Ya'ara Saks: Yes, that's right.

Ms. Marilou Denault: Since child care services were instituted, we have seen exponential growth in women's labour market participation. If I remember correctly, their labour market participation rate rose from 66% to 80%. In Ontario, it rose from 66% to 70% over the same period.

The number of families living under the poverty line also decreased as the child care services network expanded. It is a fact: offering child care services is an extremely powerful poverty prevention measure.

Dr. Christa Japel (Representative, Observatoire des tout-petits, Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon): May I add something?

[English]

The Chair: Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Dr. Christa Japel: This new family policy was originally intended to help families with the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities. It is indeed a success.

In terms of access to quality child care services, there is still work to be done. The Quebec model is always mentioned, but I think...

• (1605)

[English]

The Chair: Madame Japel, thank you. We're way over time. You may want to continue in an answer to another question.

[Translation]

Ms. Bérubé, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for appearing before the committee. This bill is important for our children.

I would also like to thank the interpreters. Without them, it would be impossible to communicate.

Ms. Denault, can you elaborate on what you said earlier about the quality of child care services? How can that be measured?

Ms. Marilou Denault: I will let Dr. Japel take that question.

Dr. Christa Japel: I will answer briefly as it is a very broad topic.

The quality of child care services is a construct. The research refers to structural quality, which includes ratios, compensation and staff qualifications. It also refers to the quality of the process, that is, the quality of interactions between staff and children, and between staff and parents. There are many aspects.

In North America, there are two measures that are used a lot: the ECERS scales, for the preschool level, and the CLASS system, the classroom assessment scoring system. The ECERS scales cover a whole range of factors, such as furnishings, personal care, activities, interaction, daily schedules, and so forth. The CLASS system is used to evaluate interactions during two 25-minute periods, but does not evaluate the overall environment. That is very important, however, so there is room for improvement in that regard.

Do I have any time left?

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: You still have some time, but perhaps Ms. Denault would like to add something.

Dr. Christa Japel: I do not want to forget the two studies conducted by the ministry as part of its *Grandir en qualité* inquiry. During our research in the longitudinal study of child development in Quebec, for which I was responsible for the child care quality component, the only reason we chose the ECERS scales was that they had been translated into French and validated, which allowed for comparison with a variety of countries. Those scales are used in Europe, the United States and no doubt somewhere in western Canada. They are updated regularly to make them more specific, and lend themselves very well to customized training. I have used the scales as part of quality improvement initiatives, because there are some things that should definitely not be observed while others must be observed. As a result, progress can readily be made by changing one element in the sequence.

These scales are similar to the Maslow pyramid, and there are a number of them for each age groups. I really liked the definition of quality suggested by Thelma Harms, one of the three authors of all of these scales, because she said the starting point must be the child's needs. All children in all countries have the same needs: to grow up in a safe and secure environment, in which they can develop meaningful relationships with others and be surrounded by adults who are sensitive to their needs and respond to them appropriately. Children must also be able to develop an interest in learning, language skills and all their skills through activities suited to their abilities. That is a simplified summary.

• (1610)

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Can you talk about the quality gaps between the early childhood centres and the for-profit child care centres and the reasons for those gaps?

Dr. Christa Japel: International studies and those we have conducted here in Quebec, namely, the longitudinal study of child development in Quebec and the two studies conducted as part of the *Grandir en qualité* inquiry, revealed a significant quality gap between non-profit child care centres, the so-called early childhood centres, and for-profit child care centres.

People wonder why and I always say the reason is in the name. For-profit centres want to earn a profit, and they do so by hiring workers with less training whose wages are lower and by cutting corners on educational material. That explains many of the gaps.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Japel.

[English]

We'll now go to Ms. Gazan for six minutes, please.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you so much, Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Dupuis or Mr. Racine.

In Winnipeg, I represent a community called Winnipeg Centre, which is right next door to St. Boniface. We have an absolutely rich Franco-Manitoban community, which in fact is very much tied to the Métis community of Manitoba, and certainly the French language. The way it's been maintained in St. Boniface, which is very much an Anglo city, is pretty marvellous.

How can Bill C-35 be amended to better reflect the unique child care needs of official language minority communities, or even language minority communities?

[Translation]

Mr. Alain Dupuis: In our brief, we propose seven amendments, but I will focus on two of them in particular.

The first pertains to clause 8 of the Bill C-35, regarding funding commitments. It is very important that we add a provision stipulating a financial commitment to official-language minority communities. Too often, and not just in the case of early childhood, but for all programs for which there are federal transfers to the provinces and territories, the services are not actually offered because no budget or quota has been set on the basis of demographic weight.

Let us consider Mr. Racine's example, where francophones in New Brunswick account for 33% of population, but have access to just 15% of child care spaces. The federal framework legislation must stipulate a funding commitment for a number of places that is at least equivalent to the demographic weight of francophones. That said, so few places have been available to francophones over the years that there could be some catching up needed along with a greater investment based on demographic weight.

The second amendment pertains to clause 11 of Bill C-35, relating to the National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care. We would like at least 10 of the 18 Council members to represent francophone minority communities. The Council must consider the reality of francophones outside Quebec, since it is responsible for providing a framework for all future transfer payment agreements.

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: I would also note that the first point raised by my colleague Mr. Dupuis is very important. We have looked at many previous studies, from 2017 to 2021, and found that, without a funding commitment, the provinces' investments are next to nothing. So a commitment is always necessary.

Consider British Columbia, for example, whose government has made a \$52-million commitment to indigenous peoples. We are very happy for them, but for francophones, the government has only committed to holding consultations.

That is why Bill C-35 must include strong provisions relating to funding and respect for minority communities.

• (1615)

[English]

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

My next question is for Dr. Japel.

You wrote an article in 2021 that the non-profit child care centres, the CPEs, are “the jewel in the crown” of Quebec’s child care system. You’ve also written that “for-profit child care is less likely to deliver the levels of quality needed to foster children’s development, school readiness and well being.” Can you please expand on that?

Dr. Christa Japel: I’m trying to remember if I really wrote that it’s “the jewel in the crown”, because we are still struggling with the CPEs because they had so many cutbacks. We can say they are better than the for-profits in terms of quality.

With regard to school readiness—which, if I understand correctly, was your other question—we noticed that children who were in a CPE had an advantage. The problem is that the children who most need this kind of a setting are under-represented. Vulnerable populations are less likely to have a space in the CPE. The effect that the CPE could have for their school readiness is very, very weak, because they are not in very good settings.

I did a study about pre-kindergarten. We have full-time pre-kindergarten now, and I wanted to see if the quality of the pre-kindergarten did have an impact on school readiness in a population of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. I realized most of them.... Twenty per cent were not in child care before going to *maternelle 5 ans*. Of those who were in child care, a very small proportion were in the CPEs, and the others were in for-profit and family-based care. We have seen in our studies within the Quebec longitudinal study something interesting, which is that if you look at an upper socio-economic class and a lower socio-economic class and you look at the quality of the CPEs, you see that they’re not very different, but if you go into for-profit day cares, they’re lower. There is a big quality difference. As well, for home-based care, there’s a big quality difference.

What I’m saying is that we need to work on creating more CPEs and, coming back to access, get the children who most benefit from these better settings to be there, because that will narrow the gap. The gap is still there between children from affluent—

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Is that it?

The Chair: Madame, we’re well over the time.

Ms. Japel—

Dr. Christa Japel: Did that answer your question?

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes. I’ll ask in the next round. Thanks.

The Chair: Yes, we’re well over six minutes.

We have Ms. Gray for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Tracy Gray (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

My first questions today are for Madame Denault.

First of all, you referenced some studies in your testimony today, and I’m wondering if you would be able to table those studies, in particular the one on stability, for this committee.

[Translation]

Ms. Marilou Denault: Yes, I’d be happy to.

Actually, it’s a cross between two studies. Would you like me to explain?

[English]

Mrs. Tracy Gray: That’s fine. If you could table those studies, that would be really great. My time is limited, so I have a few questions to run through here. Thank you kindly.

You talked in your opening statement about families needing spaces in child care. I represent a community in British Columbia, and what I’ve heard from operators in my province is that presently they’re really struggling to meet the demand from parents looking for spots for their children.

An operator in my community wrote recently and said, and I’ll quote her here, “people who can afford it do not give up their spaces.” Then she went into a description of, for example, someone who has acquired a space who’s on maternity leave. They want to keep their spaces, but in fact they’re not being utilized. Do you hear similar situations in your province?

• (1620)

[Translation]

Ms. Marilou Denault: Dr. Japel, have you seen this happening?

[English]

Dr. Christa Japel: If I understood rightly, is it that parents don’t give up spaces?

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Yes, that’s the question. When they’re paying the fee, which is lower than they would have paid previously, they don’t want to give up the space; therefore, they’re holding the space and paying for it.

Dr. Christa Japel: Well, that happens; sure, that happens, yes, because if you lose that space, you’re.... I mean, the child has to be there. We have monitoring for presence. You can’t just pay for the space and not send your child to child care, because that would be really unjust for people who are waiting. There are people who pay in full and then the child isn’t always there, but I think there’s a tolerance level to how much children can be absent, because it could be an abuse of a low-contribution space.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Right, and these are children who may not even be there yet, but their number has come up, so they have the space and they're paying for it, but the child's not there.

Dr. Christa Japel: Oh, it's even before the child gets there. I would have to check into that. I'm not sure if that's a practice that is....

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Thank you. There are other times when they are technically not there. That is what you're saying. I appreciate that.

I have a couple of questions for Ms. Bisnath.

You mentioned, of course, that there's such a need for child care. I'll give you a couple of quick examples.

I was talking to someone in my community. There are two doctors who are looking to move to Canada, and they're going through all the immigration processes and they're almost at the end, but they're considering not moving because they've realized that there are no child care spaces available when they move here. One other example I'll give is a child care operator in my riding expressing frustration on how governments have, and I'm going to quote her exactly here, "shown a total lack of responsibility for removing roadblocks in certifying educators, retraining them and licensing facilities", causing further backlogs.

We know that the government has said that there's a need to hire 40,000 new child care workers across Canada in the next three years to meet their targets. To meet this demand, various streams will have to be used. There's schooling and training, and there's immigration, and all of those things take time.

Based on your experience, do you see this as being feasible to achieve with the current actions that are being taken?

Ms. Julie Bisnath: I'm sorry; are you asking if it's feasible that they come up with all of those—

Mrs. Tracy Gray: Yes. Will there be 40,000 educators in less than three years from now?

Ms. Julie Bisnath: I can't speak from a place of evidence, but anecdotally from my own experience and our experience as an organization, it seems highly unlikely. There are staffing shortages across Ontario and across Canada as well. From our perspective with home child care, we have long been advocating direct licensing or individual licensing, or some sort of process that would make it easier and more likely for individuals to get licensed. I know that other provinces across the country do have that type of option, but for us here in Ontario, it is definitely a barrier. If that barrier were removed, it would open up access to educators and also access to child care spaces.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gray, Ms. Denault and Ms. Bisnath.

Mr. Collins, you have five minutes.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all the witnesses for attending this afternoon.

We've received some incredible testimony today, and it mirrors a lot of what we heard from other witnesses who've been before the committee on the same subject matter.

I want to start by saying that I've had the opportunity to tour many licensed child care facilities in my riding and my city of Hamilton. In the early days, I think we've seen some tremendous success. So far, I think we've had 96% buy-in from operators in terms of signing on to the system. Early numbers are—and this is from a staff report in Hamilton—that we've seen some big savings: \$3,600 in child care fees in 2022 and an average savings of \$9,100 for families in Hamilton this year. There's incredible success in the early days.

My fear in going through this is that we have some reluctant dance partners with some of our provincial partners. It speaks to some of what Ms. Denault talked about earlier in her opening comment in terms of standards, in that there has to be a high level of training. With that high level of training comes a high level of service. I think I'm using your words, Ms. Denault.

I want to speak to you about the advantages that we have with licensed child care facilities. We've heard a lot of testimony about the importance of non-profit providers in terms of having a licence. As a long-time municipal councillor, I know that those licences mean something. It's a minimum level for a standard of care. There are inspections that are tied to those licences.

For me, as a parent, when I had my children in a facility in Hamilton, which was non-profit and licensed, I knew they were getting quality care. I knew that the ECEs who were operating that facility went to school for that. They were highly trained.

You talked about the units that need to be completed, and how important they are for the child's development and to give the family a sense of safety that when they drop their child off, they are getting quality care.

Along those lines, I would ask you to elaborate on your first point. You talked about the high level of training.

Going back to the reluctant dance partner I talked about, I'm very concerned that the provinces, here in Ontario especially, may not be as committed to building capacity in the system and putting people through our colleges that offer these certificates and certification.

How do you see us building capacity, knowing that through COVID, there are thousands of vacant positions in the sector, and we're still recovering from that? We are offering a service and we know that we're going to need new positions on top of those that we lost prior to the pandemic or during the pandemic.

I'm sorry for that preamble. I had to get that out, just in terms of giving context to where I am in Hamilton and where we are in the province of Ontario.

How do we build capacity under a very strained system right now, when we may have provinces that aren't that committed to doing so?

• (1625)

[Translation]

Ms. Marilou Denault: I agree that it's a challenge.

In Quebec, the labour shortage is also an issue in early childhood education. We saw action taken to address the problem during the pandemic. Sadly, the hiring criteria were loosened and people began hiring staff who were not fully trained. Improving working conditions for educators and catching up on wages would certainly help make this profession more attractive—it has enormous value for human life—and alleviate the labour shortage.

To come back to your comment about for-profit day care versus not-for-profit CPEs, studies do show that in not-for-profit settings, 83% of educators are qualified on average, while only 45%, nearly half as many, are qualified in unsubsidized, for-profit day care settings. Therefore, non-profit settings appear to protect staff quality to some extent.

[English]

Mr. Chad Collins: I'm running out of time here. To wrap up, I have one last question.

When you compare the two services that are offered, I think you've painted a picture today that parents and children would get a higher quality of care in a licensed non-profit facility than they would in an unlicensed facility or a for-profit facility. Is that a correct statement to make?

The Chair: Give a short answer, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Marilou Denault: Yes, they do, absolutely. That's what the Quebec studies are showing.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Collins.

[Translation]

Ms. Bérubé, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

• (1630)

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Racine and Mr. Dupuis, earlier, we spoke specifically and respectively about sections 8 and 11. In your opinion, what's the most important amendment you would like to see in Bill C-35?

Mr. Alain Dupuis: I feel it's section 8, which covers funding. If there's no guaranteed funding in the framework law for francophone minority communities, we won't see any services on the ground.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Why do you feel francophone day care centres should be treated differently?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: I feel it's essential. We have very distinct needs. The dynamics in our communities are often very different from those in the anglophone community.

Take, for example, family-based services. We often see day care centres start to accept anglophone children, then gradually become bilingual and eventually turn into anglophone centres. That challenge doesn't exist on the English side. However, it's very much a reality on the French side. So we need to support the French side.

I know that we don't have a lot of time, but I could give you several examples to show how very different things are on the French side.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Finally, why do you want to include francophones?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: It's crucial, because I can tell you that if francophones aren't included in the bill, they won't be considered.

Existing agreements will eventually expire. Once they have, they will be renegotiated by new governments that will look to the legislation resulting from this bill. Therefore, the bill must include obligations towards francophones. It's essential.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: I have one last question.

We're seeing labour shortages across the country. In your opinion, why do francophone realities more urgently require attention than the realities of others?

Mr. Jean-Luc Racine: You know that it's a very small market. When educators leave, it's very hard to replace them. In British Columbia, for example, we're being forced to close day care centres due to a shortage of educators. It's an extremely difficult and distressing situation.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bérubé.

[English]

Madam Gazan will conclude this round for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead, Ms. Gazan.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

Going back to you, Dr. Japel, one of my concerns in terms of licensing is that there need to be certain standards in place. I was an early childhood educator in my former life, and then a trained teacher. We had a set curriculum in both—both public—and our funding was dependent on teaching the curriculum, so it was mandated.

Is that part of the issue in terms of actually having greater regulation to ensure that children have the same level of quality in education? People often confuse child care with babysitting, and it's not. It's early childhood education. Is that part of the issue, would you say?

Dr. Christa Japel: In Quebec, we have a program, *Accueillir la petite enfance*, and it should be implemented. It should be used in every setting, whether it's for-profit, not-for-profit or home-based care.

The rules and regulations could be a little bit more precise to have parameters that guarantee more quality. I'm just thinking about the amount of space that's allocated for a child from three to five in a centre-based place. It's 3.75 square metres per child, and that includes movable furniture. We live in a country where we have six months of winter. It is not enough. I'm talking about things like that, which are really important. Do we have to have a courtyard for the children? Not necessarily. If there's a park 500 metres away, that will do. These are all quality elements, but I think we—

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes, it's quality control. For example, in an early childhood care centre, you have to have things like a sand table, a certain number of manipulatives out, a certain number of books so that you can teach a curriculum. When it's not regulated—

Dr. Christa Japel: There is no.... What do you do?

• (1635)

Ms. Leah Gazan: Is that a problem?

Dr. Christa Japel: It is a problem, and I think a curriculum also makes sure that we are providing activities that foster the global development and also makes sure of what we need in terms of material. People need to be guided, and a lot of people don't have that training.

They're nice people; I'm not saying that they're bad people, but they don't have the training.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Japel and Ms. Gazan.

That concludes the first hour. I want to thank the witnesses for coming back again and giving your testimony to this committee on an important piece of legislation, as you so clearly articulate. Again, thank you.

Committee members, we will suspend for a few moments while we get ready for the next group of panellists.

Again, thank you so much for coming.

• (1635)

(Pause)

• (1640)

The Chair: I will remind those appearing in the room and virtually that you can choose the official language of your choice. Interpretation services are available. In the room, use the microphone that's attached to you. Those appearing virtually can choose the language with the icon at the bottom of your Surface laptop. If we lose interpretation services, please get my attention. We'll suspend while it's being corrected.

I'll remind the new members that no screenshots of the proceedings of the committee in the room are permitted. Please wait until I recognize you by name before you begin to speak. At this time, I'll also remind committee members that when you're posing questions, please identify which witness you wish your question to be directed to.

We'll begin by introducing Kim Hiscott, executive director, Andrew Fleck Children's Services; Marni Flaherty, acting chief executive officer, Canadian Child Care Federation; and Maggie Moser, Ontario Association of Independent Childcare Centres.

We will begin with Ms. Hiscott for five minutes.

Ms. Hiscott, welcome to the committee. You have five minutes for your opening statement.

Ms. Kim Hiscott (Executive Director, Andrew Fleck Children's Services): Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before this committee.

I am the executive director of Andrew Fleck Children's Services, which is a multi-site, multiservice, not-for-profit agency here in Ot-

tawa. This commitment to early learning is something I have dreamed about for decades, and the generational, long-term influence on children and families will support Canada beyond what we can even imagine.

I echo the comments from others that Bill C-35 can be strengthened by adding a robust, clear definition of "early learning and child care".

Andrew Fleck Children's Services has been around since 1911. We have a license capacity of over 3,000 spaces in our group sites and home child care. When we shared with our families that our fees would be reduced, the relief was palpable. We heard stories like this:

We haven't been able to save for a house since my child started daycare, it was almost as much as my rent. We thought we definitely would not be able to afford having another child either. This will change our lives so very much that we finally don't have to feel like we are drowning just to have quality care since we could not afford to stay home either.

However, as you know, affordability is only one component of respecting early learning and child care in Canada. I would like to focus on what else we need to pay attention to, including appropriately compensating and supporting early childhood educators, the expansion of not-for-profit licensed child care and the modernization of licensed home child care. I submitted a brief that expands on these points.

For decades, not-for-profits have kept our parent fees as low as possible to support families and the affordability of licensed child care. This came at the expense of the dedicated individuals working with children and those who support them. With 80% to 85% of our budgets attributed to compensation, we know that employees have subsidized the sector, and we are now experiencing the consequences of this approach. Not only are fewer individuals interested in obtaining their credentials; committed, experienced educators are leaving for other opportunities.

We have models in Ontario, and likely elsewhere, in which the role of an early childhood educator has been appropriately evaluated through a robust job evaluation process comparing the scope, breadth and depth of responsibilities of the role with comparators. It is appropriate and necessary to look to post-secondary institutions and municipalities that directly operate licensed child care and replicate their compensation packages, including benefits and pensions.

Factors that inspire early childhood educators to remain in the sector, such as programming time, professional learning, etc., are also necessary, alongside appropriate compensation, but not instead of. Other current or proposed solutions to address our labour crisis without addressing compensation are destined to fail.

There are already numerous examples of programs that are not at their allowable license capacity due to the lack of available employees, and the problem is expected to get worse. As we look to expand access to early learning, we know that finding qualified employees will be our biggest barrier. However, being optimistic and expecting that compensation issues will be addressed, we know that the expansion of our services will be necessary, because our current waiting lists are already very long.

I urge the government to strengthen its expectations that all federal investment should be focused on expansion in the not-for-profit sector. Public funding must be viewed as an investment to create long-term sustainable community assets. A federal lending program—either directly or through a third party—that not only offers financing at reasonable lending rates but also supports not-for-profits through the complicated construction or leasehold negotiation process is also necessary.

Not-for-profits can and will expand. They can be and are responsive to their communities, and they often work with other community agencies, such as services for seniors or housing, to the greater benefit of neighbourhoods.

Now I'll move to the modernization of licensed home child care.

Currently in Ontario, there are two options for home child care: licensed and unlicensed. Both include the individual provider being self-employed, but only licensed care includes oversight, monitoring and CWELCC eligibility so that parent fees are affordable.

With its flexibility of hours, including evenings and weekends, licensed home child care must be a component of a national system and may be the most viable option in smaller communities.

The licensed agency model is key to supporting quality. The federal government should separately and in great detail review compensation options that agencies can offer to these small business owners, including how to access benefits and while ensuring that providers are able to retain their self-employed status.

If we do not embrace licensed home child care, the agency model and self-employed providers, we will be perpetuating a two-tiered system in which families who can choose centre-based care because the operating hours fit with their schedules will have access to affordable child care, while those who need the flexible hours offered by home child care won't.

It's likely that jobseekers will make choices based on affordable access to child care, meaning that we may unintentionally exacerbate a workforce crisis in some sectors due to the lack of child care access.

The Canada-wide early learning and child care plan is, overall, a welcome direction for our country and for all Canadians. It makes sense that it will take conversations with all of us—including those directly delivering services—to get this right. Bill C-35 is a positive direction. Let's make sure it has the teeth needed so that all expectations can be met.

Thank you.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hiscott.

We'll now have Ms. Flaherty for five minutes, please.

Ms. Marni Flaherty (Acting Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Child Care Federation): Thank you.

I speak to you today as the interim CEO of the Canadian Child Care Federation, an organization representing child care affiliates and members from across Canada. It is Canada's largest national non-profit charitable organization supporting child care in research and policy.

Since 1983 we have been giving voice to the knowledge, practice and passion of early learning professionals and practitioners across Canada.

I know my time before the committee today is limited. The federation has submitted a detailed written submission on recommendations for your committee's study on Bill C-35, an act respecting early learning and child care in Canada. Today I would like to focus on a key point.

The current child care landscape in Canada is a mix of private, public and not-for-profit operators. The government has made it clear that all new growth in child care should be primarily in the not-for-profit and public sector. The federation strongly endorses publicly managed child care.

All regulated child care services must be organized, funded and delivered in a way that puts the best interests of children and families first. This should be the core requirement for all services that receive public funding. Child care is a public good that brings significant benefits to all of society in much the same way that our more developed public education and public health systems do.

We are in the early days of this rollout. This is a huge transformational change in that it will take time to collect data, build a system, and ensure recruitment and retention strategies for early childhood educators. Our ECEs are the backbone of this system.

The federation welcomes a transformational change. Why? It is because today early childhood education in Canada is an uneven patchwork. It is unavailable in many communities; wait-lists are long; the quality of programs is uneven; and for many parents, quality licensed child care remains unaffordable and not accessible.

We would further recommend that within Bill C-35, funding be explicitly described as annualized and tied to the licensed, regulated system of child care, which includes centre-based and home child care. We applaud the government for their commitment to a national plan. Let me be clear: The federation believes in and supports Bill C-35.

We recommend that there be deeper consideration and directions in two areas—workforce development and quality for children.

Let me speak to workforce, our ECEs.

The success of the new plan is possible only with a well-trained, valued and compensated early childhood educator workforce. This includes educators working in centre-based and licensed home child care, a critical and often poorly understood part of the child care system. We would like to see strong language in the bill that promotes sustained investment in a national strategy for the recruitment, education and retention of the early childhood educators workforce.

We need to establish national standards for competitive wages and national education and credentialing standards for ECEs. We also need foreign credential recognition that supports high-quality programs and accelerates the entry of newcomers who are trusted and able to work in Canada.

I would like to highlight three more very important points.

One, the federation believes in the critical importance of language in the proposed act to ensure accountability through the annual federal public report on progress.

Two, the federation would like the act to clearly stipulate that there be Canadian-based early learning and child care research across a range of disciplines and methodologies. We need research into many areas, including early learning and child care for immigrant children, for children with special needs, for children from official minority language communities and for indigenous children.

Three, we support the National Advisory Council on Early Learning and Child Care and enshrining this advisory body into law.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about Bill C-35. The Canadian Child Care Federation fully supports this critical piece of legislation. We believe in the goal of the federal government to provide a Canada-wide quality and affordable early learning and child care system. The federation and all the early childhood professionals and practitioners we speak for look forward to continuing to do the work together with our government partners to realize the transformative system for children and families.

• (1650)

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Flaherty.

We'll go to Ms. Moser for five minutes.

Ms. Maggie Moser (Director, Board of Directors, Ontario Association of Independent Childcare Centres): Thank you for inviting me to speak today.

My name is Maggie Moser. I'm a member of the board of the Ontario Association of Independent Childcare Centres, which represents the small business owners—mainly women—of for-profit, licensed child care centres. These centres are not home child care centres, but rather larger facilities that comprise about 30% of all licensed child care spots in Ontario.

The CWELCC program has not delivered good value for taxpayers and does not meet Canadian standards of equity. The implementation provides undue benefits to higher-income families, who are sailing their yachts on the tides of the program, while those who need it most are left drowning.

Lower-income families were excluded from obtaining access to the CWELCC child care spots. Families who could already afford the fees of their centre were the ones who benefited from the rebates and discounts, while the rest were left behind on a long wait-list.

The program created a systemic barrier to lower-income families and thus also to racialized groups. Public funding is not being used for the stated purpose, which was a solution for the “she-cession” to make it possible for women to return to work and boost our economy. The original intent is not being carried out.

Based on wait-lists, it could take two to three years at least to achieve what should have been the main objective, which is to provide lower-cost child care to those who most need it and thus facilitate a return to work for these women. The program adds many costly layers of administration, which diverts funds that should be reaching families. The complexity and costs of flowing money through complicated cost-based formulas to centres, which then fund parents through discounted fees, adds even more administration, which wastes valuable resources.

Our members, who are mainly female small business owners, have been asked to provide their centres' facilities for the use of the CWELCC system without a recognition of the investments and sweat equity they have made at a time when the government was not creating the child care needed. Many of these centres have never received any government funding and have invested their life savings into their child care centres while being lumped into a category together with large corporate chains. We ask that they be treated fairly and with respect for their historic contribution.

Licensed child care centres across Canada—profit and non-profit—have been facing hardship under the CWELCC program, and many are being taken over by large corporate chains. Centres going out of business are not being purchased by the public sector. This does not benefit families, does not strengthen the system, does not increase the stated goal of maintaining mainly non-profit care and does not further the goal of raising the quality of child care in Canada.

We need a national program that overcomes these biased, discriminatory and fiscally irresponsible factors. We respectfully ask that funding of this program be reallocated as follows.

Increase the funding and expand the income range to the existing subsidy system to increase the number of lower-income and middle-income families who receive full or partial subsidy.

Adequately fund the building of new centres to create downward pressure on fees and enable more women to go back to work.

Increase the amount that can be deducted from income taxes so that parents can deduct the full costs of the child care they pay.

Recognize that for a woman to go back to work, child care fees are the cost of doing business in enabling them to go back into the workforce.

Recognize the extreme pressure on staffing, created mostly from inflation and the pressure created through the increased demand now for high-quality early childhood educators. The amounts allocated for specific staff wage increases are inadequate and insulting to the staff who kept our economy going throughout COVID. We see the resulting great shortages of staff, both ECEs and assistants, across the child care sector. We certainly support a workforce strategy to raise salaries.

Please recognize the contribution of independent small businesses in providing licensed child care at a time when child care was desperately needed over the years, and ensure that funding is structured to support for-profit small businesses.

Thank you for your time. I welcome your questions.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Moser.

We will only have time for one round because I do need a bit of committee business time. I think we can get six minutes in for each person.

We will begin with Madam Ferreri for six minutes.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to everyone today for your testimony on Bill C-35 and child care in Canada.

Ms. Moser, I'll start with you.

Can I ask you about your current wait-lists? How many child care centres do you oversee? How many spaces are there? How many parents are on wait-lists?

Ms. Maggie Moser: We have 147 spaces as well as 24 half-time spaces, going all the way from infant up to kindergarten. Our centre is 100% full. There is not one empty space in our centre.

At the moment, we have around 600 names on our wait-list. They are for spots in the next year and a half. It is a current list, in that we ask our families to contact us every six months to maintain their registration. If they haven't done that, we take them off the list so that we can maintain a list only of families who are now looking for the next 18 months.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: What we've heard a lot is that we just want to ensure there is access. We've heard from a couple of witnesses that affordability is one piece of the puzzle; it's not everything, but it's really important, I know.

It was a really big decision and it was a huge cost for me. Ten-dollar day care sounds wonderful. It is a wonderful idea, but the execution and the sustainability of it is where we want to really strengthen this piece of legislation.

One of the push-backs is that there seems to be a real divide between not-for-profit, public and private. There seems to be a lot of division on this particular subject.

Can you speak to the women who will be hurt because of the way the current bill is written? There are unintended consequences, as I have said before multiple times. Can you speak to the women entrepreneurs you've seen? Is there an experience you can share with the committee?

Ms. Maggie Moser: Certainly.

Our OAICC members are mostly women who took a risk and opened up a child care centre. They took out loans and mortgages on their houses. It's very expensive. We're talking hundreds of thousands, going into the millions, to open a centre.

Some of these women are recent immigrants who took their life savings and said, "I'm going to open a centre. This is something I know how to do." They may be people coming from an education background, like me. I was a teacher for 27 years before I opened my centre.

Generally speaking, the women in our organization opened centres for a reason: They needed a centre, or they couldn't find child care for their child. I tried to open a non-profit, and I couldn't, because I couldn't borrow a million dollars. If I had told the bank I wasn't making any money, they wouldn't partner with me or lend me that money.

Realistically, child care has been needed and it has been provided by these women entrepreneurs who took the risk and stepped up. They provided that care and they have been providing that care. They are carrying the loans and the mortgages. There is the unpaid labour and sweat equity. Some of them now, because funding is not recognizing those areas, may possibly lose their centres. They are constantly being—

• (1700)

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you. I hate to cut you off. We have only so much time.

What could we add as an amendment to this bill that would include everyone, that wouldn't exclude people? One of the things I heard is that this is now going to impact the women who have been able to flee domestic violence by opening up child care.

What could we add as an amendment to help include more, to help fill that lack of capacity and shorten that wait-list?

Ms. Maggie Moser: Certainly, for women who own centres right now, it is to make sure that the funding provided to them through CWELCC will include their facility cost, their loans and their unpaid equity, which is basically what we call profit. That chunk of money that would come from government to put into the building of a centre has really come from the private sector until now, and it has to be recompensed or they will just not continue. They can't operate, because they're non-profit.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: For clarification—because I know you have an economy background—in a not-for-profit or public, the money that is used.... You can't say for profit. The money that comes into a not-for-profit or public centre is put back into the facility to maintain it, operate it and fulfill operating costs. In a private centre, is it not the operators who are putting their own money back into it? There's a misconception that somebody is walking around with bags of money made on the backs of children.

Ms. Maggie Moser: No, that's right.

In not-for-profit organizations, you have whole layers of administration doing exactly what the owners were doing, managing the build project and overseeing many aspects. They have skin in the game, so they're there more often. There is a higher level of oversight in that particular situation. They're using public funds or different pots of money for buildings, existing buildings.

For instance, it was mentioned that staff costs of a non-profit are around 85%. My facility cost is 15% monthly. If I pay 85% for my staff and 15% for my building, I wouldn't be able to feed the children.

The Chair: Thank you—

Ms. Maggie Moser: That's why fees are higher in a for-profit centre. They have to be, because they have to cover all the things government provides to non-profits for free. The facilities, the years of creating it—everything is already there.

That's the difference.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Moser and Madame Ferreri.

We have Mr. Van Bynen for six minutes.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I, as well, want to thank all the witnesses for their contribution in helping us make some decisions on how to go forward.

It seems we're continuing to hear recurring themes. One is capacity. The other is the quality of the service provided and the differences between profit and not-for-profit, and licensed and not licensed.

My question is for Kim Hiscott.

On this capacity issue, is there anything about Ontario's implementation that is preventing expansion?

Ms. Kim Hiscott: Thank you. That's an excellent question.

Yes, there are a couple of things preventing it.

First, there is our lack of staff. We know there are a great number of registered early childhood educators in Ontario, where we have the College of ECEs, but they have left the sector. They would welcome returning if compensation were appropriate and reasonable.

The other big reason that not-for-profits would be hesitant right now, or not able to expand, is exactly what Maggie said. Being able to borrow money as a not-for-profit in order to create a centre is complicated. As I said, Andrew Fleck has been around for a long time, and we still find it very complicated, which is why I was urging the federal government to look at a loan opportunity or some supports for not-for-profits. It's because we're ready to expand.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Thank you. That's interesting. As a 30-year banker, I can appreciate some of the hurdles you face.

Is the fact that the agreements prioritize not-for-profit growth a limiting factor in space creation?

• (1705)

Ms. Kim Hiscott: No, absolutely not. That's not the limiting factor at all. Again, not-for-profits are ready to expand and want to expand.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Is the not-for-profit sector ready to expand, acknowledging some of the limitations we have with respect to the staffing and the training of staff?

Ms. Kim Hiscott: It's very much so. The biggest opportunity for a not-for-profit is being responsive to your community. You're sitting with your board of directors, looking at your waiting list, and the board is saying, "Yes, we need to address our community needs." Then, absolutely, a not-for-profit would be ready to expand.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Okay.

Newfoundland and Labrador recently announced a \$25 minimum wage for ECEs. If Ontario did the same, what would that mean for your operations and future expansion?

Ms. Kim Hiscott: It wouldn't help me. Our early childhood educators already start at \$25—a bit more, actually. What I urge us to do is to not throw out numbers. I think throwing out numbers—the wage should be \$19, \$25 or \$30, or match a school board or whatever—is actually doing us a disservice. I really think we need to do job evaluations to see the scopes, depths and responsibilities of the role of early childhood educators, see who is in ratio to them, and then determine the appropriate salary based on other comparators.

Yes, \$25 an hour might sound wonderful to somebody who's currently making \$19, but to somebody else who's not.... We need to evaluate the job and value the job more appropriately.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chair, I'll cede the rest of my time to Mr. Collins.

The Chair: Thank you. That's 36 seconds.

Mr. Chad Collins: Oh, that's great. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, through you to Ms. Flaherty, with the 30 years of experience you have in the industry, you certainly know the pulse of where we're both from—Hamilton—in terms of some of the issues that seem to be universal across the sector. They've been mentioned here today many times, such as the wage rates and the need to build capacity within the sector to accommodate demand.

When you talked about ensuring accountability on progress, you really caught my attention. Can I ask you to comment on the issues we know our service providers in Hamilton are facing? How does this relate to building capacity and competition with the school board, which was just mentioned by Ms. Hiscott, in terms of wage rates and all those things wrapped up?

My concern is that the province isn't giving this the attention it deserves. Individual organizations have asked for a workforce strategy to deal with all of these issues through a comprehensive plan.

What are your thoughts on that?

Ms. Marni Flaherty: Absolutely, and it's so wonderful to see you around the table. I'm very proud of spending 30 years in Hamilton, growing today's family.

In Hamilton we were lucky to be part of the Fast Start, and I'm not sure if.... Fifteen years ago, with Fast Start, there was a lot of data in support of smart growth in three different areas of our province, and I think there is a lot of data that we could probably learn a lot from if we could dig that out and find the best way to move forward.

Definitely working with the community is.... Municipalities in Ontario are excellent sources of managing the child care system. Municipalities can leverage relationships with school boards within their cities and help us plan a comprehensive plan for early learning and child care by utilizing schools to capacity, utilizing municipal buildings to their capacity and using other buildings that are taxpayers' buildings that have already been built or can be retrofitted so the investment stays in neighbourhoods.

As for the Canadian Child Care Federation, we do believe in publicly managed and publicly funded. Even with the not-for-profit versus profit factor, if we have strong agreements on how that money is going to be spent on wages, with perhaps a scale for rent or

leasing so that we have a really good understanding of what it really costs, and we do that market study to make sure that people aren't taking advantage of public dollars....

There is a lot of work to be done, but we have some great examples in Ontario, in my opinion. I'm speaking for the Canadian Child Care Federation, but I spent my life in Ontario and I know we could make this happen.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Flaherty and Mr. Collins.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bérubé, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Hiscott, you spoke earlier about the importance of including certain definitions in Bill C-35. Could you elaborate on that?

[*English*]

Ms. Kim Hiscott: Thank you. I do understand French.

[*Translation*]

I understand a great deal.

[*English*]

However, I want to make sure I completely got your question.

I think right at the very beginning it would make a lot of sense to have a really robust definition of how we're defining early learning and child care. We don't want to mislead people or to imply that when we're talking about early learning and child care, we're meaning those casual relationships with family members or other arrangements that families will make. What we're talking about is licensed early learning and child care delivered by qualified early childhood educators and/or, in the case of home child care, the agency model to support providers who are self-employed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Thank you.

Ms. Flaherty, is there anything else you'd like to see added to Bill C-35?

[*English*]

Ms. Marni Flaherty: There are two highlights that we need to really look at. One is quality for children and what it means, so I think that should be added. The other is embedding the national advisory council into law so that we have a federal lens on the development of a national child care strategy.

I know it's a three-year thing right now, but it might be a good idea to embed it in law so that whatever happens in the future, we're looking at it through a federal lens and seeing that our early childhood education system in Canada continues to grow and strengthen.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Ms. Moser, what do you feel needs to be added to Bill C-35 as a priority?

[English]

Ms. Maggie Moser: I see the disparity in who is benefiting from it right now. It advantages higher-income families, because they were already in the centres because they could afford it. People of lower income are not benefiting from it right now.

Given the purpose of the program, I would like to see a way to make that change. It could direct more money as part of CWELCC in expanding the subsidy system, for example.

It shouldn't be just by chance that you happen to be on a wait-list. If you have a lower income, then you are not on that wait-list. You're not on my wait-list if you're of lower income, because you couldn't afford my fees. People register when they're pregnant. The day they get pregnant, they write to register. It's going to be two years before the person who is of lower income is going to be able to access care. Maybe at that point the child is three years old and they've already practically gone through most of the early years, the most expensive part of child care.

People who are of lower or middle income are not getting subsidies. Perhaps they don't qualify for subsidies right now because they make a little too much money to get subsidies, but they didn't make enough money to be on those lists for the day care and child care centres, which are getting CWELCC funding to reduce fees.

To me, this is backwards. We're not using this money to help women who really need to be able to get care and go back to work. That bothers me as a taxpayer. It also bothers me because I am using my centre for the CWELCC system because I believe in child care so much. Even if I lose some money because of doing that, I'm willing to do it. I want people who really need the care to get it.

I think this has to be looked at very seriously by the committee. Right now, the people getting the benefit of these millions of dollars are people who can afford the care. It's probably not in all centres; I'm just giving you my perspective from what I and many other people see. There are winners and losers, but the winners are definitely people of higher income. I can't tell you how to fix that, but I think it needs to be fixed.

• (1715)

Ms. Kim Hiscott: In addition to the definition, I would also like to add that there should be a stronger piece around the expectation of compensation. Early childhood educators should be valued for the role that they offer. Also, there should be a lending opportunity for federal funding for borrowing for expansion.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Bérubé.

[English]

We're running a little long, unless you have a short question.

[Translation]

Ms. Sylvie Bérubé: Ms. Hiscott, what general criteria must be considered to ensure that National Advisory Council members are reflective of the diversity of Canadian society?

[English]

Ms. Kim Hiscott: It's an interesting question.

The Chair: Please give a short answer.

Ms. Kim Hiscott: I think that we continue to review, then, who the members of the council are representing so that we continue to ensure that the members are representing not only research but practice as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Bérubé and Ms. Hiscott.

We have Madame Gazan for six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much, Chair.

We've heard a lot about difficulties in expanding the child care system in order to be able to roll out a national child care strategy. One of the central pieces I'm seeing is about a workforce that's unwilling to work in this industry because of poor pay and poor benefits. We know that it's problematic, and—

The Chair: Ms. Gazan, the bells are ringing. I need unanimous consent from the committee to continue.

Do we have unanimous consent to continue until about 5:30 or 5:35? I believe it's a 30-minute bell.

Mrs. Tracy Gray: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The bells are ringing, and we do have to head into the House of Commons. I'd like to make the suggestion that we can write to the witnesses with any other questions we have. They can write in to the committee so that all of us will have an opportunity to see their answers.

Therefore, I'd like to move a motion to adjourn so that we can get into the House for the vote.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gray.

The committee can only move forward with unanimous consent. I do not have unanimous consent.

Thank you, Ms. Gazan and Ms. Hiscott.

The committee is now adjourned.

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