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PROVINCE SHOULD TAKE TIME TO GET CHILD CARE DEAL RIGHT, SAY CHILD CARE OWNER/OPERATORS
For Immediate Release

ONTARIO—November 3, 2021— Ontario's independent licensed child care owner/operators are encouraging the Province of Ontario to take its time in negotiating a child care deal with the federal government. "The wrong deal for Ontario could leave families with fewer licensed child care spaces and paying much, much more for them," says Andrea Hannen, Executive Director of the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario (ADCO). According to recent research, it could also leave Ontario taxpayers on the hook for more than \$9.5 billion annually.

Ontario is not only Canada's most populous province, it has a more complex child care system than most. About a quarter of Ontario's licensed child care spaces are in centres run as small businesses, which the federal/provincial agreements signed so far seem aimed at excluding. Ontario is also the only province that hands over almost all provincial funding for licensed child care to municipalities, rather than working directly with child care licensees or parents. Simply pumping more taxpayer money into municipal bureaucracies is unlikely to result in lower child care fees for Ontario families. Ontario is also the only province with government-run full-day kindergarten, which represents an existing taxpayer investment of over \$3.6 billion per year.

Some provinces were quick to sign on to the federal government's promised \$10/day child care plan, because of longstanding deficiencies in their own systems. Manitoba and Saskatchewan's government-directed, non-profit child care systems have long resulted in some of the country's lowest child care access rates and some of the lowest wages for early childhood educators. More taxpayer funding is the only way such systems can create new child care spaces. Quebec got preferred treatment, but even its "model system" is plagued by ongoing labour disputes, quality concerns and years-long waiting lists. At any given time, about 25% of parents with children enrolled in licensed child care are paying market rates because the heavily subsidized \$8.50/day system doesn't have the capacity to create enough new licensed spaces.

"Equity concerns also need to be addressed" says Hannen. "The federal/provincial agreements that have been signed so far allocate 100% of the new funding to the families who use licensed child care." In Ontario, that's only about 25% of all families with young children. "Not all of these families are choosing these arrangements because of cost or access concerns," says Hannen. "Many of the families who are choosing these options do so because they need more flexibility than the licensed child care system can provide or they want care that is aligned with the values of their faith or culture, or because of their child's unique needs or temperament."

"Our hope is that the Province of Ontario will stand up for parental choice and sustainability," says Hannen. "The best way to do this is by funding all families directly, so they can make their own choices. At minimum, the goal should be to ensure that all licensed centres are funded equally, based on enrollment, rather than trying to push families into government-directed child care settings."

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ADCO is the industry association for Ontario's independent licensed child care centres, both commercial and not-for-profit. Independent licensed child care centres are those that are not run by public sector entities such as municipalities or school boards, or by large multi-service agencies such as YMCAs. Most are small businesses, owned and operated by women. For further information, please contact: Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario (ADCO) at admin@adco-o.on.ca or 1-800-567-7075.