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## ONTARIO ELECTION 2018—A PARENT'S GUIDE TO PARTY PLATFORMS

You are receiving this information because you have one or more children enrolled in an independent licensed child care centre in Ontario. Independent licensed child care centres are not affiliated with any government entity such as a municipality or a school board, or any national multi-service organization such as a YMCA. This allows independent licensed child care centres to remain focused on meeting the needs of the families it serves, without conflicts of interest or political concerns that could undermine the quality of care they provide.

Over a quarter of Ontario's existing licensed child care spaces are in independent licensed child care centres. These centres are regulated, inspected and licensed by the Ontario Ministry of Education and must adhere to the standards set forth in the Child Care and Early Years Act. This is true for all licensed child care programs, whether they are run as small or large businesses, or as not-for-profit corporations. Only school boards are exempt from these regulations.

The forthcoming Provincial election is likely to have a major impact on the quality, availability and affordability of licensed child care in Ontario. It's important to go beyond campaign slogans and vague promises about "free" child care. It's also important to remember that child care is one of a range of issues that could affect your family's quality of life. Gas prices, hydro prices, hospital wait times, school closures, the environment and the level of Provincial debt we pass on to our children may also be key factors in your decision.

To better understand how the three main parties stack up in terms of their child care plans, one must consider three things: the cost of creating new licensed spaces, whether the party can actually deliver on what it promises, and whether or not the party intends to add to Ontario's existing supply of licensed child care or simply to replace it with yet another government bureaucracy.

The platforms of both the Liberal and the NDP seem to be based on the notion that new, regulated child care spaces must be created with taxpayer dollars, in public institutions. The PC platform leaves open the possibility of new, regulated child care spaces also being created by small businesses, entrepreneurs, and/or not-for-profit groups.

This is an important differentiator. It not only determines the cost burden placed on taxpayers as the demand for licensed child care grows, it determines whether the parties can actually deliver what they promise. Given that it took over five years to roll-out Ontario's full-day kindergarten program, it seems unlikely that either the Liberals or the NDP will be able to create the number of spaces for younger children outlined in their party platforms in the timeframes they have promised.

In terms of maintaining the expanded number of spaces the Liberals and the NDP have promised, the outlook isn't much better. It already costs Ontario taxpayers over a billion dollars per year just to maintain the full-day kindergarten program, yet most school boards charge parents additional fees for "wrap-around care" and for being even a few minutes late at pick-up time. What loophole will they find to make sure parents pay more for that "free" child care? And what steps will they take to cut costs? Will they keep increasing group sizes? Will they keep closing neighbourhood schools in favour of bussing younger children to centralized "super-schools?" This remains unclear.

What is clear is that both the Liberals and the NDP favour replacing the independent licensed centres that currently exist with larger, public sector facilities. In 2017, the Liberals went so far as to impose an "auspice threshold," making it harder for independent licensed centres to serve families in receipt of fee subsidy and forcing some centres to close. The Liberal Government's stated goal was to limit the growth of independent licensed centres such as the one your child attends. The NDP platform follows this same precedent. The PC platform appears to support a wider range of child care choices for families of all income levels.



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## FACTS ABOUT LICENSED CHILD CARE IN ONTARIO

- 1 in 4 of Ontario's licensed child care centres is an independent licensed child care centre, such as the one your child attends.
- Independent licensed centres are, on average 15% smaller than other types of centres, making it easier for them to develop close and lasting relationships with the families they serve.
- Most independent licensed child care centres are small businesses, owned and operated by women. Many of these women are also Registered Early Childhood Educators or certified teachers.
- Whether they are run as businesses, or as not-for-profit corporations, all licensed child care centres in Ontario must adhere to the same regulations, which are enforced by the Ontario Ministry of Education. The only exceptions are programs run by school boards, which the Child Care and Early Years Act specifically exempts.
- Families in receipt of fee subsidy are routinely funneled into school-based programs, which tend to have larger group sizes and fewer staff.
- Some school boards charge families as much for wrap-around care (the portion of the day before and after the regular school day) as some independent licensed child care centres charge for a complete day of care, including a hot meal and two snacks.
- When the Ministry of Education expands a school to create new child care spaces, 100% of the cost of the expansion falls on taxpayers.
- When an independent licensed child care centre expands to create new child care spaces, there is no cost to taxpayers.
- It is highly questionable that any Government would actually be able to make good on an election promise of dramatically increasing the number of licensed child care spaces within two or three years if it continued the current Ministry policy of discriminating against centres run as small businesses, didn't include these small businesses in the overall expansion plan, or worse, tried to shut them down entirely.
- Independent licensed centres such as the one your child attends currently account for some 25% of Ontario's licensed child care spaces. Aside from the massive tax increase it would take to replace these spaces if they were to be lost, Ontario families are unlikely to give a second term to a Government that is perceived as having destroyed hundreds of well-known and well-loved small businesses. It is not unusual for parents to send their children to the same centre they attended when they were young.

### Who We Are

*The Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario is comprised of the owner/operators of independent licensed child care programs. ADCO member centres are inspected and regulated by the Ministry of Education and may be run as businesses, or as not-for-profit corporations. Together, ADCO members own and operate over 500 licensed child care programs in Ontario. ADCO is non-partisan and does not support or donate to any political party or candidate. The information contained in this document is for your consideration only and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the centre your child attends, or of its staff.*