



Ref: 221744

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Adrienne Montani
Provincial Coordinator
First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
#810-815 W Hastings Street
Vancouver, BC V6C 1B4

Dear Ms. Montani:

Thank you for the letter sent on March 17, 2015 regarding the Child Care Registry initiative (the Registry). On behalf of the Minister of Children and Family Development, I am pleased to respond.

I appreciate you taking the time to share your views and concerns about the Registry. The feedback and suggestions provided by the First Call Early Childhood Development Roundtable are valued and will be taken into consideration as the Ministry explores options related to the Registry. I would like to take a moment to share some information regarding the Registry initiative.

As part of the *BC Early Years Strategy*, the Province committed to providing parents with increased information regarding the availability of licensed child care spaces in their communities. Currently, both parents and child care providers utilize numerous and varied resources to find child care and fill available spaces. Parents devote considerable time and effort to finding licensed child care providers through word of mouth, community resources, Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) offices, the Child Care Program Map, and internet searches. Learning about vacancies, and evaluating and registering with providers must be done by contacting each provider individually and providing similar enrolment information to each. Providers advertise their services on equally varied channels, and manage their waitlists through a range of systems.

To assist in the exploration and design of an online Registry, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), in partnership with Government Communication and Public Engagement's Strategic Initiatives Division and Open Road Communications, commenced a service design project in September 2014 with the objective to better understand how parents search for and navigate child care opportunities and the needs and challenges of both parents and child care providers in BC. This project included discovery research with over 50 parents, child care providers, and community associations in Victoria, Vancouver/Surrey and For St. John. The research findings confirmed the following:

- Parents are going online to find child care and experiencing challenges locating consistent, up-to-date information;

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- Parents working non-standard business days and hours struggle to manage the child care search process and find flexible arrangements within traditional business hours;
- Parents struggle to understand the range of child care options and factors related to quality;
- Parents experience confusion and financial costs with accessing child care provider waitlists;
- Providers use different methods to prioritize, evaluate and make decisions when enrolling children in programs or placing them on waitlists; and
- Providers experience challenges in managing the volume of parent inquiries.

The intent of the Registry initiative is to improve parents' access to up-to-date information about the availability of child care services in their communities. An online Registry platform would serve as a provincial gateway through which parents can express interest in securing a child care space with multiple providers, track their search history, and communicate with numerous child care providers - all of which contributes to reducing the amount of time and effort parents spend searching for, deciding upon, and securing licensed child care. For child care providers the goal of this initiative is to reduce administrative burden associated with tracking and updating waitlists.

In addition to reporting proprietary information captured through the Child Care Operating Funding Program, the vision for the Registry is that it would allow child care providers to upload detailed information about their facilities. This may include links to their websites, highlighting special, unique or cultural programming, and information about vacant spaces. The Registry would also offer providers a channel through which to communicate with parents expressing interest in their services, while allowing providers to retain flexibility in how they manage their waitlists and register children.

In your letter, you express concern that the Registry initiative is intended to replace CCRRs. I would like to clarify - the Registry initiative is intended to build upon the depth of knowledge and service provided by CCRRs. I recognize that in addition to parent referrals, CCRRs provide a range of services and supports to the child care sector, including supporting professional development for child care providers, providing assistance to parents in applying for child care subsidy and providing support to licence-not-required child care. As you noted, CCRRs gather information regarding child care in their communities; however, the approach to collecting and providing this information to parents varies across communities, resulting in variability and inconsistency across the province. Through a Registry a centralized, provincial web-based platform for both parents and service providers, including CCRRs, to access consistent and up-to-date information regarding licensed child care could be realized.

With regard to your concern about the accessibility of the Registry for parents facing literacy, language, and other barriers, we are working to ensure the business requirements for the online platform will include considerations to support broad parental and provider participation. For example, pen and paper options will be available for families and providers who elect to not utilize the online platform and Help Desk support will be available to support the system. CCRRs and Early Years Centres could also play an integral role in supporting families and providers to navigate the Registry. Conversations have been taking place between the ministry and the CCRR Regional Coordinators and will continue over the coming months.

As part of the process for exploring the potential of a registry MCFD posted the Request for Information (RFI) for a Registry to BC Bid on March 24, 2015. Information gathered by the RFI will assist MCFD in determining the level of market interest in developing a Registry within the available timelines and budget (not to exceed \$700,000). The results of the RFI will also help MCFD determine whether to proceed with a Request for Proposal (RFP).

If a viable solution is identified and subsequently pursued through an RFP, there will be opportunity for further public consultation. MCFD intends to work with parents and child care providers to identify their needs and gather practical, useful advice to inform systems development and to build a platform that will make a positive difference for both providers and parents while securing personal information in compliance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Similar to other jurisdictions, it is anticipated the Registry will be implemented using a piloted or graduated approach. This allows the usefulness and usability of the system to be evaluated based on user feedback and observed results prior to province-wide implementation.

Government continues to support quality child care as a priority, and seeks to work closely with parents and communities to create a strong foundation for early childhood development, early learning, and child care. We continue to engage with the sector and stakeholders, including parents, to ensure our collective efforts are well targeted and evidence-based.

Thank you again for writing and sharing your views.

Sincerely,



Arif Lalani
Executive Director
Provincial Services Division
Ministry of Children and Family Development

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