



PARKS AND RECREATION ONTARIO

**CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED REGULATION
UNDER THE CHILD CARE AND EARLY YEARS ACT,
2014 AND THE EDUCATION ACT**

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About Parks and Recreation Ontario

Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) is a non-profit association that advances the health, social and environmental benefits of quality recreation and parks through evidence-based practices, resources and collaborative partnerships. We envision a future for Ontario where every person has equitable access to vibrant communities, sustainable environments, and personal health.

PRO represents over 6,500 members in municipalities, non-profit recreation and parks, health promotion, sport, public health, education, and related sectors. PRO's members provide recreation and park services and facilities to more than 85% of Ontario's population.

An established leader in quality, PRO's HIGH FIVE® Quality Standard is recognized across Canada and by the Ontario Government. HIGH FIVE provides training and resources to organizations that serve children and older adults, to help those organizations ensure that all participants have a positive experience.

PRO appreciates the opportunity to provide its input on the proposed regulations under the Child Care and Early Years Act (CCEYA) and the Education Act.

Introduction

PRO commends the government on taking steps to making it easier for child care licensees and providers to comply with the CCEYA and the Education Act, increasing choice and availability for families, and improving standard of care. The proposed regulatory amendments are an acknowledgement of the significant role that the recreation sector can play in meeting the childcare needs of families across the province.

As a key stakeholder, Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) is part of the Ministry of Education's authorized recreation working group. In this role, PRO has provided ongoing input on the CCEYA and how quality recreation programs provide greater access to quality programs for children.

This submission is based on input from its membership through an online survey that sought feedback on specific regulatory amendments and input on policy positions. PRO's membership includes municipal, non-profit, academic and for-profit providers of recreation and sport. The positions represented in this submission represent a breadth of perspectives on how authorized recreation should play a role in child care.

PRO has focused its response on:

- 1. Eligible Operators/Providers of Authorized Recreational and Skill-Building Programs**
- 2. Third Party Programs Providing Before and After School Care**
- 3. Financial Assistance for Children Enrolled in Authorized Recreational Programs**
- 4. Authorized Recreational and Skill-Building Programs: Extended Day and Third Party Programs**
- 5. Timeline for Implementation**

Eligible Operators/Providers of Authorized Recreational and Skill-Building Programs

The amendments propose expanding the list of eligible authorized recreational and skill-building program providers to include HIGH FIVE® accredited programs and urban Indigenous organizations that are members of Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres with Friendship Centre status.

PRO Position

PRO supports this amendment because it recognizes that HIGH FIVE® Accreditation is a sector-standard that enhances the quality and safety of programs for children. Although most Accredited organizations are already authorized providers (e.g. municipalities, Boys and Girls Clubs etc.), this allows Accredited organizations that are not currently recognized authorized providers to offer recreational and skill building programs for children without seeking authorization from local service system managers.

Additional Considerations

Responses from PRO's stakeholders indicate that there is a need to expand the amendments listed to include the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS). The CFMWS serves the families of the men and women that serve in the Canadian Forces by providing sports and recreation programs, family and charitable support, retail and personal financial services. Their primary mission is to help families manage the unique challenges of military life. Currently, because the Canadian Forces is neither a municipality or a non-profit, it is unable to offer authorized recreation programs as a form of childcare. Expanding the list of eligible operators to include the CFMWS would allow them to provide the families of service members with the flexible, on-base childcare options they need.

Third Party Programs Providing Before and After School Care

Current Education Act regulations require that the operator of a third party program in a school to be a non-profit entity or municipality unless a school board is exempt from the requirement in the current school year. The proposed regulatory amendment would remove this requirement.

PRO Position

PRO does not support this change. While PRO commends the government for continuing to take steps to increase access to before and after school care, O. Reg 221/11 already allows for school boards to enter into agreements with for-profit providers if there were no non-profits or municipalities with an interest in operating the program. This provision empowers school boards to choose the best solution for their students while balancing affordability for families and quality.

Research has shown that in most cases, public and non-profit child care programs are higher quality than their for-profit counterparts. Staff are better trained and higher paid, while the programs remain affordable for families. Removing this provision in the regulation could have unintended consequences that could see a reduction in quality, cost-effective options for families.

Additional Considerations

Remove this proposed amendment while keeping the current provision that allows school boards to choose for-profit providers in cases where there are no non-profit or municipal options.

Financial Assistance for Children Enrolled in Authorized Recreational Programs

Currently, paragraph 6(1)8 of O. Reg. 138/15 requires that children must be at least 6 years old to be eligible for fee subsidy and special needs supports in recreation programs. The proposed amendment would change the eligibility requirements to children who are 4 years or older. This amendment would bring the regulation in alignment with Bill 66, Restoring Ontario's Competitiveness Act, 2019 which allows children aged 4 and older to participate in authorized recreation programs. It would also help to align with the age eligibility requirements for financial assistance for board-operated after school programs for kindergarten aged children and day camps.

PRO Position

PRO supports this amendment because it recognizes the importance of recreation both broadly and as a part of Ontario's childcare system. Participation in quality recreation programs in childhood can have a lasting impact on the mental, physical, and social well-being of an individual. Making this essential facet of healthy development more affordable for families will have a positive impact on the health of children in Ontario. The amendment also makes financial assistance eligibility requirements more consistent across the childcare continuum.

Additional Considerations

In many communities, subsidy and special needs funding does not meet demand. It is imperative that the government review the subsidy funding to better respond to community need for both licensed and recreational programs. PRO also encourages the government to update the guidelines for service system managers to ensure that they align with the new regulation.

Responses from PRO's survey regarding these amendments indicated that subsidies are not managed consistently by municipalities across the province with some communities opting to funnel special needs funding to licenced daycare facilities rather than recreation programs. Some respondents indicated an interest in having families qualify for subsidies provincially then using them to select the local program that best fit their needs. In addition, survey respondents were concerned about a possible increase in demand for subsidy funding given the inclusion of 4 and 5 year olds in authorized recreation programs.

Authorized Recreational and Skill-Building Programs: Extended Day and Third Party Programs

The current regulation under the Education Act allows school boards to use authorized recreational and skill building programs as third party programs in fulfilling their obligation to provide after school programming for grades 1 to 6. The proposed regulatory amendment would expand this to include programming for kindergarten students (aged 4 and 5).

PRO Position

PRO supports this amendment and is pleased to see that the government is enabling school boards to enter into agreements with recognized providers of authorized recreational and skill-building programs. Furthermore, this change recognizes the role that authorized recreation can play in the provision of childcare in Ontario.

Additional Considerations

Although PRO supports this amendment, PRO asks that the government consider removing the time restriction stipulating that recreational and skill-building programs can only operate up to three hours per day. This would allow families the option choose a high quality recreational program both before and after school. For families that require both before and after school care totalling more than three hours in a single day, their choices are limited to selecting authorized recreation programs for only a part of this time. Removing this restriction would provide additional choices for families and remove barriers to participation in quality programs. PRO recognizes that such a change would require additional amendments not provided here and a longer implementation time to ensure all stakeholders have time to plan appropriately.

Timeline for Implementation

The government anticipates that the effective date for their regulatory changes would be September 1, 2019.

Sector feedback

While PRO is pleased that the government is taking swift action to increase access to recreational and skill-building programs, PRO is concerned that the proposed implementation date of September 1 does not meet the diverse needs of municipalities and recreation providers across the province. PRO recommends that the government phase make use of a compliance deadline as opposed to an implementation deadline.

For some authorized recreation providers, the proposed timeline presents a significant challenge. For many municipalities and recreation providers that will be registering children for fall programs beginning in June, brochures and promotional materials have already been produced, making it difficult to incorporate these regulatory amendments. For these providers, now that 4 to 5 year olds can participate in authorized recreation and skill-building programs, stakeholders need to understand any changes to the published guidelines for recreational programs (e.g. space allocations, ratios, age groupings). Changes to the guidelines would have to be in place with adequate time for providers to make the necessary changes for September 1. In addition, for many recreation providers, space in schools is limited and with the addition of 4 and 5 year olds in recreation programs, additional space for different ages and stages would be required. It may be challenging for some locations to accommodate that within the implementation time frames of this regulation.

At the same time, in smaller and rural communities where the municipality is the only provider in the area able to offer programming for 4 to 5 year olds, the current timeline aligns with the urgency of their citizens' need for quality, affordable childcare. For this reason, these communities are in favour of the proposed timeline of September 1, 2019. Using a compliance deadline would meet the needs of the diverse set of authorized providers in the province.

PRO also recommends that the ministry use the expertise of the Recreation Stakeholder Working Group (including representatives from PRO, Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCA) to work with government to update the guidelines.

Conclusion

The proposed regulatory amendments presented here are a positive step towards making childcare more affordable, empowering families to choose the best program for them, and for recognizing the importance of recreation in healthy childhood development.

PRO looks forward to continuing to work with the Recreation Stakeholder Working Group to ensure the breadth and depth of Ontario's childcare system. PRO thanks the Ministry of Education for the opportunity to provide this feedback and would be pleased to support further consultation as the need arises.

For additional information, please contact:

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