



**Alberta
Family Child Care
Association**

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Submission to The Ministry of Children's Services

Review of *The Child Care Licensing Act* and Regulation

Introduction

As a key partner in the delivery of early learning and child care, the Alberta Family Child Care Association (AFCCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input for the Ministry of Children's Services review of the *Child Care Licensing Act* and Regulation.

Since 1989, the AFCCA has represented regulated day home agencies across the province, each of which has a contractual obligation to the Government of Alberta to monitor and maintain high quality standards in the child care field.

Our organization gives a voice to families, regulated family day home educators and agencies. We promote the development and adoption of standards that ensure Alberta children have positive educational and developmental experiences and outcomes.

Over the course of 30 years, our organization has worked closely with the provincial government to help develop and implement a series of standards that have served the child care system well. We support evidence-based decision making in all policy matters, and are guided by the best interests and educational outcomes of children.

Child care needs continue to grow in our province. Alberta has attracted many young families who are seeking the many advantages our province has to offer. We support the ability of these parents to contribute to Alberta's economic development through access to safe, accountable, and reputable child care services. Accessing child care services will continue to be a key issue as Alberta emerges from the economic turmoil created by COVID-19.

The AFCCA's submission builds on the successful foundation of Family Day Home agencies and day home educators, and assists the government in further developing and managing the appropriate levels of regulation, oversight, capacity, and service levels to meet the growing needs of Alberta families.

Context

Firstly, it must be stated at the outset of this submission that while the AFCCA recognizes the Government of Alberta’s “intention of reducing red tape,” as referenced in the *Ministry of Children’s Services Business Plan 2020—23*, and in the creation of the Associate Ministry of Red Tape Reduction, it is crucial that all efforts to update legislation and regulation concerning the care of children minimize risks associated with any change.

If the COVID—19 public health pandemic has taught Albertans — indeed all Canadians — anything, it is just how much work is truly required to care for vulnerable populations such as children (and senior citizens) properly, with compassion, commitment, and patience.

The recent but perpetual presence of children in the home, combined with the scarcity of employment and economic desperation of some Alberta households has reinforced the need for effective, affordable, dependable, healthy, and safe child care services.

Regulatory streamlining in the child care sector must always be mindful of this context.

Secondly, the AFCCA recognizes this review is occurring following the 2018 release of Judge Joshua Hawkes’ *Report to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General Public Fatality Inquiry* into the death of 22-month-old MacKenzy Jane Woolfsmith, who perished while in private unlicensed care.

We support Judge Hawkes report’s suggestion that specific intent of legislative review should be to shift the focus from solely regulating the size of unlicensed child care to a focus on reducing risk and increasing protective factors in all forms of child care, and on managing risk through regulation.

The Hawkes report, and the recent discontinuation of the accreditation model contextualizes our focus on the issue of accountability, which is further described in this document.

Family Day Home Demand and Supply

Demand: What Parents Want

Choosing quality child care for any family is a very important decision, and approved family day homes provide an essential child care option for parents. Parents want to find a safe, healthy environment that supports the social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional development of their children.

AFCCA members report that parents seeking family day home services focus on three key considerations:

1. quality,
2. safety, and
3. accountability.

Each of these considerations aligns with the benefits offered by the agency model of family day home oversight, and directly supports the Government of Alberta's stated intention of ensuring the efficient delivery of child care services that maximize the time spent with children.

Quality

Parents want to find committed and experienced early child educators, who have access to training and workplace supports, at day homes with reasonable educator—to—child ratios. They want people that can be trusted to supervise and meet the needs of a diverse clientele.

Safety

Parents want strong child safety, compliance, and oversight policies, including vetting of day home educators, criminal records checks and inspections, and limits on who has access to day homes. They want to be sure children are cared for not just at their day home, but on outings and in outdoor play areas. They want to know their day home educator has policies in place to handle emergencies, and that they have insurance.

Accountability

Parents want day home educators that are accessible, accountable, and people they can work with to understand how their children are being taught and cared for. Current contracts and oversight through the agency model ensures the appropriate safety and quality of child care environments limiting unsafe conditions for families.

Supply: The Role of Family Day Home Agencies

Family day home agencies meet the quality, safety, and accountability expectations of parents by working directly with approved family day home educators.

Agency child care consultants are certified at a minimum as a Child Development Worker. They are responsible for monitoring approved family day home educators for compliance with the family day home standards.

Family Day Home Agencies:

- ensure day home educators align with and stay abreast of government regulation
- help place children in the most appropriate day home to meet parent expectations and ensure successful outcomes
- mentor educators to develop program plans for children at different stages of development
- provide advice about nutritious meal planning, and connect with community resources
- assist educators in the development of their home-based business
- assist educators to choose toys and equipment that are safe and developmentally appropriate
- facilitate training and professional development for day home educators and child care consultants
- review safety and compliance
- provide additional support and consultation for educators going through challenging personal and professional situations
- seek to continuously follow the latest research in best practice in early learning and child care to promote the healthy development of children
- assist families to find flexible, full time, shift and part time options for their children
- help families access government subsidy programs

Recommendations for Improvement

The AFCCA recommendations below reflect member feedback that was guided by the questions the Government of Alberta used to frame the legislative review discussion

These questions are:

- 1. What regulations are preventing child care providers from expanding and improving their operations?*
- 2. How will this impact compliance costs? How much regulatory burden does this take away? How will this help new child care providers open?*
- 3. How can we ensure safe, quality child care while reducing barriers on providers and workers?*

The input from our members has been categorized under the same parental priorities of quality, safety, and accountability for child care options.

1. Quality

Quality and quality improvement are demonstrated through ongoing monitoring and evaluation. The termination of the accreditation process makes the role and value of day home agencies more essential. Existing legislation for unlicensed and unapproved providers is ambiguous and inconsistent. Greater consistency is required to minimize risk to children and their families.

To address the quality of child care in the province the *Child Care Licensing Act* and Regulation should reflect:

- a. that knowledge of early childhood development is essential for all day home educators to contribute to successful educational and social outcomes for children.
- b. an understanding that enhancing the skills of day home educators is desirable.
- c. that day home educators need access to more flexible options for post-secondary education in ELCC so they can continue to work and advance their education.
- d. that day home educators need access to professional development funding like other Early Childhood Educators in the field, to help retain and grow this workforce.
- e. change the name from day home provider to day home educator in the standards manual, to help families and the public understand the difference between regulated and unregulated day homes, and to recognize there is indeed “early learning” in early learning and child care.

2. Safety & Accountability

A substantial number of children in Alberta are cared for on a regular basis by unlicensed, unregulated child care providers. The lack of appropriate legislation for unlicensed settings—legislation that attends to the safety and quality of child care environments—and the lack of oversight processes can create unsafe conditions. As indicated in the Hawkes report, unlicensed child care can be outright unsafe.

Recommendations below can increase safety by encouraging unregulated homes to contract with an agency to gain access to agency support, monitoring, and screening services.

In the future the *Child Care Licensing Act* and Regulation should:

- a. adjust child-educator ratios to create equity in the system between regulated and unregulated day homes.
 - i. Ratios for unregulated day homes should be lower than for regulated day homes.
 - ii. Ratios in regulated day homes should exclude the educators' own school-age children, to increase the availability of regulated spaces in the province.
- b. allow day home agencies to help each educator determine what is the right ratio for each day home, taking into consideration such things as space, educators' background education, and experience.
- c. institute an appropriate maximum number of children that unlicensed providers can care for.
- d. include minimum standards for unlicensed child care providers including the required posting of notice and active informing of parents that they are unlicensed and as such not regulated and not monitored by an agency or the government.
- e. include provisions for inspection and oversight of unlicensed providers.

The Future

The AFCCA and its members believe the best way to improve legislation and regulation governing the provision of child care in Alberta is for decisions to always be guided by the standards parents expect, and deserve, for their children.

As a member of civil society, our organization is committed to helping the government deliver government programming and services that achieve efficient, effective results.

Day home agencies are part of the child care system that delivers a high standard of benefit to children, families, and early childhood educators. The day home agency model is an essential aspect of the Alberta child care system.