



May 22, 2017

Office of the Hon.Indira Naidoo-Harris, MPP
Associate Minister Education (Early Years and Child Care)
77 Wellesley Street
12th Floor
Ministry of Education
Toronto, Ontario

The Honorable Indira Naidoo-Harris,

We are writing to you on behalf of Family Supports Institute Ontario (FSIO) to congratulate you on your recent announcement of additional child care investments towards more Ontarian families accessing licensed, affordable child care and fee subsidies. We know that, when implemented, these investments will benefit and provide some financial relief to the many families that struggle with the high cost of child care. In addition, we recognize the connection between access to affordable, high-quality child care and family economic security.

As we understand it, Ontario's vision in the *Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework and Expansion Strategy* goes beyond the provision of a single service. Ontario's vision supports the development of an integrated system of child care and early years programs, including Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centers, that is focused on quality, affordability, accessibility, and responsiveness.

Further, *Ontario Early Years Child and Family Centers: A Public Plan* recognizes the importance of family support programs within a broader early years and child care system. In our communications with you over the past year, we have consistently reiterated our support for the OEYCFC initiative. At the same time, we have noted our concerns that the existing funding envelope is insufficient to achieve the goals of making programs more accessible to more families. We were therefore disappointed to note that no additional OEYCFC funding was included in the recent budget announcement. With current spending in the range of \$1 billion annually for licensed child care, we had hoped that at least a small increase would be provided to boost the \$97 million that has been traditionally allocated to family support programs.

We also note that funding allocations to support service realignment and distribution have yet to be announced, and that initial CSM/DSSAB service plans will not be submitted to the Province until September for implementation by January 2018. We remain concerned on behalf of our members and all of those working in the family support sector about the continuing

potential for service disruption. In June 2016, we wrote to you in some detail about our concerns and related system transformation implications and issues.

While we fully acknowledge the new service system management responsibilities of CMSMs and DSSABs, it appears that, for the most part, their responsibilities revolve around administrative and business processes, planning, contract responsibility requirements, and IT systems. These responsibilities are no doubt necessary from a public accountability standpoint.

Conversely, FSIO's interest is in supporting system transformation through fostering collective impact and capacity-building among practitioners working in family support programs. As you may know, FSIO is the only organization that is dedicated exclusively to all aspects of supporting the family support sector, including strengthening practitioners and improving the provision of high-quality family support programs across Ontario. Through FSIO, family support practitioners have access to a provincial network of professionals working in similar programs across the province and easy access to resources that promote quality, consistency, and innovative program approaches. As well, practitioners benefit from information about current developments, an informative newsletter, and professional learning opportunities.

As the four program streams come together in 2018 under the banner of OEYCFCs, we believe that, in the absence of a prescribed professional learning requirement, it will be important to establish a common foundation of understanding of the theory, principles and practice of family support programs in Ontario. We believe that OEYCFCs are more likely to be successful in the long run if they are delivered by appropriately-trained and skilled staff working within a clearly-articulated model that is rooted in theory. FSIO is uniquely placed to take the lead on the delivery of a training component linked to the implementation of the OEYCFC initiative.

We recently redeveloped our website—to be launched over the summer—in anticipation of the sector's need for information, resources, training, and support as OEYCFCs are implemented. The new site provides us with the reach and tools required to support practitioners, wherever they are. The FSIO Board has also been working to define what we refer to as "The Essentials of Family Support".

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the *Essentials*. Please let us know when you might be available.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Cindy Smith

Cindy Smith,
Chair

cc: Shannon Fuller, Assistant Deputy Minister of the Early Years Division