



report

Special Committee on Child Care Videoconference

July 9, 2020

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 11 Component and 3 affiliate unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 390,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

**Special Committee on Child Care
Videoconference
July 9, 2020, at 1:00 pm EDT**

Participants

BCGEU/NUPGE	Stephanie Smith
HSABC/NUPGE	Colin Brehaut
HSAA/NUPGE	Trudy Thomson
SGEU/NUPGE	Darryl Firth
OPSEU/NUPGE	Nicole Pierce Heather Petrie
NBU/NUPGE	Sophie Landry Mockler
NSGEU/NUPGE	Sandra Mullen
NAPE/NUPGE	Kristal Rice
NUPGE	Larry Brown, President Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer Brenda Hildahl, National Coordinator Nadia Ibrahim, National Representative

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair, Stephanie Smith, BCGEU President, welcomed participants to the meeting and acknowledged the traditional and unceded Indigenous territory from which she joined the meeting.

Smith reviewed the agenda. She underlined how long the labour movement and allies have been working on this issue, but the pandemic has cast it in a new light for governments and the public.

Participants introduced themselves and their roles.

2. National Report—National Overview and Role of the Committee

Larry Brown, NUPGE President, provided an update on NUPGE's recent and ongoing work related to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. He pointed out the threat of austerity in the economic recovery and shared how NUPGE is actively working to counter the austerity narratives that are already emerging. We need governments to be investing in public services—for the sake of those services and their users, and for the health of Canada's economy.

He spoke about the recently introduced Bill 32 in Alberta, which represents an attack on unions' ability to be involved in issues like the ones to be discussed during this meeting. NUPGE is determining how best to respond.

Brown provided an overview of the vision for the special committee. During the COVID-19 pandemic, child care was an issue that emerged immediately among NUPGE members. As we brace for the second wave of COVID-19, early learning and child care are poised to be a continued or renewed concern for families and communities. This situation moved NUPGE to renew our efforts to advance the position that we need a national child care strategy.

The special committee has been struck to inform what those efforts might look like. Brown thanked committee members for their participation and Smith for her leadership.

3. Roundtable—Updates on Child Care During COVID-19

Participants provided updates on the situation in early learning and child care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Updates included details on closures of child care providers, emergency child care for workers deemed essential, the various funding models and guidance to providers, and reopening plans across the provinces.

The roundtable highlighted that child care arrangements across Canada continue to be a patchwork.

It also revealed common issues across the provinces, such as the high cost of child care for families. In most parts of the country, the cost of child care is prohibitive.

Notably, educators and child care staff across Canada are underpaid. In some of the provinces, these workers are not unionized.

Another common issue raised was the insufficient number of child care spaces. Several participants also commented on the limited progress that has been made on access to child care despite the decades of advocacy and organizing. There continues to be a lack of understanding of child care needs by employers, governments, and even other workers.

Participants identified concerns around the reopening of child care settings in the pandemic context. There continue to be health and safety concerns related to COVID-19, but there are also concerns around

- the continued operations of providers (i.e., funding model);
- the long-term impact on mental health, emotional well-being, and development of children and families;
- the proper supports and resources for educators and other staff.

Bert Blundon, NUPGE Secretary-Treasurer, provided summary remarks. He echoed the point that the pandemic has exposed the serious lack of child care in Canada and its implications. He underlined the impact on labour force participation, particularly for women. Blundon noted that the value of quality child care goes beyond the benefit to working parents: we can't forget about the immense social and educational benefits for children. In turn, child care has broader societal and economic benefits.

4. Discussion—Possible National Campaign

The special committee discussed national-level advocacy efforts around child care and what they might look like. There was consensus about what we are fighting for: a national child care system that is universally accessible, publicly funded, not-for-profit, high quality, fairly compensates its workers, and is unionized.

The discussion focused on possible goals, strategy, and messaging of the national efforts:

- Child care as part of the economic recovery (one aspect of what's been deemed "shecovery") and long-term resilience of the economy in the face of national or global crises.
- Child care as a social justice issue.

- The economic, social, and health benefits of child care—We don't need more studies—the research is clear: what we need is action to implement a national system.
- Identify vulnerable groups (e.g., children requiring additional support, differing family structures, parents who work part-time, shift work, or precarious jobs).
- Emphasize the role of the federal government and child care as a national issue.
- Frame child care the same as school-aged education: education and care start from birth.
- Note the political context—a minority federal government.
- Survey allies' current efforts or campaigns, identify shared positions and/or demands with allies, and determine whether there are opportunities for information-sharing, coordination, and/or collaboration with
 - National child care groups (e.g., Child Care Now and Canadian Child Care Federation)
 - Provincial coalitions (e.g., Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC)
 - Provincial associations
 - Labour organizations (e.g., Canadian Labour Congress)

5. Concluding Remarks

The discussion emphasized that now is the time to act on child care. The pandemic has underscored the need for and value of child care, spurred growing recognition and commitments from elected officials, and expanded public awareness and support. Participants noted that the political context and the pandemic context present an opportunity to push for the implementation, finally, of a national public system for child care.

Next Steps

Participants are asked to send any additional thoughts or materials to Nadia Ibrahim (nibrahim@nupge.ca) for sharing with the special committee.

NUPGE will follow up on some of the next steps identified in the discussion. The meeting report will be circulated when complete.



NATIONAL UNION OF PUBLIC AND GENERAL EMPLOYEES

- B. C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU)
- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
- Canadian Union of Brewery and General Workers (CUBGW)
- New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees (NBU)
- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)
- PEI Union of Public Sector Employees (PEI UPSE)
- Newfoundland & Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE)

The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of Public Services International.

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