



report

Special Committee on Child Care Videoconference

February 16, 2021

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.

The office of the National Union of Public and General Employees is situated on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

We recognize and acknowledge the crimes that have been committed and the harm that has been done.

And, we dedicate ourselves, as a union, to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous Peoples in a spirit of reconciliation and striving for justice.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

**Special Committee on Child Care
Videoconference
February 16, 2021
1:00 pm EST**

PARTICIPANTS

BCGEU/NUPGE	Stephanie Smith
HSABC/NUPGE	Colin Brehaut
HSAA/NUPGE	Trudy Thomson Megan Connolly
OPSEU/NUPGE	Luisa Quarta
NBU/NUPGE	Leslie Hebb
NSGEU/NUPGE	Sandra Mullen
NAPE/NUPGE	Kristal Rice
NUPGE	Larry Brown, President Len Bush, Managing Director (Office of the President) Brenda Hildahl, National Coordinator, Research Nadia Ibrahim, National Representative Sandra Megeney, Administrative Representative
Guest Presentation	David Macdonald, Senior Economist, CCPA

1. Land Acknowledgments

National Representative Nadia Ibrahim acknowledged that the land from which she was joining the meeting, and where the NUPGE office is located, is on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg people. The Chair, Stephanie Smith, acknowledged that she was joining the meeting from the traditional unceded territory of the Musqueam nation. Some participants provided land acknowledgments, as well.

2. Anti-harassment Statement

Ibrahim read NUPGE's Anti-harassment Statement, a copy of which was provided to participants ahead of time.

3. Welcome and Introductions

Smith welcomed participants to the meeting and invited them to introduce themselves.

4. Opening Remarks: National Report—Larry Brown, NUPGE President

President Brown reflected on the pandemic context, the threat of new variants, and burnout among front-line workers. He noted NUPGE's work related to the pandemic, which recently has been looking at vaccines—specifically, who gets prioritized and whether the employer has the right to insist employees are vaccinated.

He pointed to some other areas of work. To prepare a defence against post-pandemic austerity, NUPGE worked with the CCPA on [a report](#), which shows that the bulk of COVID-19 spending has come from the federal government, not the provinces. Related to anti-austerity, NUPGE continues to advocate for fair taxation. Brown also spoke about ongoing work on long-term care, domestic violence, and inequality.

Brown reiterated the importance of this special committee. In this political moment, there is a real opportunity to finally achieve a national child care system. Noting the federal government's commitment to child care, he and participants discussed how the details of a national system will be key. He also underlined the need for national standards to ensure an accessible, affordable, and high-quality system.

Brown concluded by remarking on how there will be push to “get back to normal” after the pandemic. But we know that “normal” wasn't working, and so we need to be part of determining what the new normal looks like, including universal access to child care.

5. Report of the October 13, 2020, Videoconference

Participants were provided a link to the [report of the last Special Committee on Child Care Videoconference on October 13, 2020](#). Participants were asked to send any errors or omissions to Nadia Ibrahim (nibrahim@nupge.ca).

6. Component Reports

Smith facilitated a roundtable of updates on the child care situation and work being done across the provinces. For example, participants noted the fruitful collaborations on child care between Components and provincial advocacy associations, and through provincial federations of labour.

Several Components reported on affordability. Newfoundland and Labrador has recently implemented \$25-a-day child care. The program, delivered through the existing Operating Grant Program, applies to regulated child care. BC continues to move towards a \$10-a-day system, but wait-lists remain a challenge. Child care, which is currently under the Ministry of Children and Family Development, will be moving to the Ministry of Education. Child care advocates, including unions, continue to push for a provincial wage grid for the sector and for child care spaces to be created within public spaces.

In contrast, the \$25-a-day child care program in Alberta has ended, as the Kenney government chose not to renew the pilot project. Access to affordable child care remains a huge challenge for many Albertans.

A common barrier that was reported is the lack of awareness around existing supports, subsidies, and services for families. Parents and caregivers may not know that supports exist, or where to go to find them.

Another theme that emerged is the ongoing workforce issues, including low wages and the need for recruitment and retention. Addressing these human resource issues is a key part of ensuring a high quality of child care. In Ontario, the Ford government is proposing changes to the *Child Care and Early Years Act* that threaten to move the province backwards. [The proposals](#) would lower staff qualification requirements, change group sizes and ratios, and introduce an unlicensed child care registry.

The very different experiences across the country underscored the need for a national system with national standards. Several participants commented on how long our movements have been fighting for affordable, accessible, and high-quality child care. The COVID-19 pandemic has simply shone a spotlight on how critical it is.

7. Guest Presentation: David Macdonald, Senior Economist, CCPA

David Macdonald, Senior Economist at the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), presented research on child care during the pandemic. First, he spoke to the child care elements of his recent report, [Picking up the Tab](#).

He went on to share some preliminary findings from the CCPA's not-yet-released annual child care fees survey, which this year included pandemic-related questions. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions and share their perspectives. NUPGE will work to help amplify the report when it is released in March.

8. National and Coordinated Activities

National Representative Nadia Ibrahim provided a report, and sought feedback, on both national and coordinated activities that NUPGE and its Components have been engaged in since the last meeting.

a. Letters to federal and provincial governments

Following the Speech from the Throne, which included a commitment to develop a Canada-wide system for early learning and child care, President Brown sent [a letter to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Chrystia Freeland](#). Brown emphasized that the national system must be universally accessible, publicly funded, not-for-profit, and high quality, and it must meaningfully support its workforce. Sent in the lead-up to the fall economic statement, the letter aimed to put pressure on the federal government to deliver on its commitments. Noting the gendered impacts of the pandemic, the letter also underlined that child care will be essential to a *she*-covery. [NUPGE's reaction to the economic statement](#) addressed child care.

The letter to Minister Freeland reiterated the positions and recommendations included in President Brown's [letter to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Ahmed Hussen, in July 2020](#). Letter templates were developed for Components to send the same message to Minister Hussen and to their Premiers. Components were encouraged to share with the National Union if they have received any responses.

b. Child Care Now virtual lobby—reports from participants

NUPGE members participated in the virtual MP lobby organized by Child Care Now in October 2020. Special committee members from HSAA and the NSGEU spoke about their positive experiences with their lobby meetings.

c. NUPGE child care poll

In November 2020, NUPGE commissioned [a national poll on child care](#), which was conducted by Abacus Data. The aim was to gauge public experiences and attitudes on various issues related to child care, including access and cost, and on possible solutions. It showed that Canadians value child care and want to see universal access.

The poll results can be (and have already been) useful in our advocacy work, as well as proving informative in where there may be opportunities for educating or raising awareness. Participants discussed how there may be opportunities for union education on what a universal, national child care system means and why it's important, and to help people understand the research that is out there.

There was interest in viewing the detailed results from the poll, which Nadia Ibrahim recirculated to participants following the meeting.

d. Meeting requests

NUPGE has requested a meeting with Minister Hussen to discuss our concerns and recommendations regarding child care. Maryam Monsef, Minister of Women and Gender Equality, who has been tasked with supporting Minister Hussen on the child care file, was copied on the request. NUPGE has also requested a meeting with Leah Gazan, NDP Critic for Families, Children and Social Development, to learn more about the child care debate in Parliament.

9. Discussion on Next Steps

There was interest in pursuing other avenues for meetings with federal government officials. It was noted that NUPGE delegates attending the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York would typically have the opportunity to meet with federal ministers. Because of the pandemic, it is unclear whether such meetings will happen virtually, or not at all. It was suggested that the NUPGE delegates, via the CLC delegation, might look into requesting a meeting with federal ministers, such as Minister Monsef, on these grounds.

Ibrahim shared that NUPGE would be submitting comments to the federal budget consultations, with child care as one of the focus areas. The submission was circulated to the special committee following the meeting. It was noted that individuals can also participate in the consultation. A link to the online portal was circulated to participants should they wish to share with their networks.

The possibility of a federal election was discussed. It will be important to make sure child care is an election issue. It may be valuable to show where the parties and candidates stand on child care.

With the upcoming CLC Convention, emergency resolutions will be accepted. The special committee passed a motion recommending that a child care resolution be sent to the National Executive Board for review.

Smith welcomed participants to send any additional ideas, or updates on work within their Components, to her and/or to Nadia after the meeting.



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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