



report

**Special Committee
on Child Care
Videoconference**

October 13, 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
October 13, 2020**

PARTICIPANTS

BCGEU/NUPGE	Stephanie Smith
HSABC/NUPGE	Mike Lucas
HSAA/NUPGE	Trudy Thomson
OPSEU/NUPGE	Maya Simon Nicole Pierce Heather Petrie
NBU/NUPGE	Leslie Hebb
NSGEU/NUPGE	Sandra Mullen
NAPE/NUPGE	Kristal Rice
NUPGE	Larry Brown, President Nadia Ibrahim, National Representative Sandra Megeney, Administrative Representative

1. Welcome and Introductions

Nadia Ibrahim, a National Representative, welcomed participants to the meeting. She acknowledged that the National Union office is located on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg people.

The Chair, Stephanie Smith, introduced herself and acknowledged that she was joining the meeting from the traditional territory of the Musqueam nation.

Smith asked participants to introduce themselves.

2. Opening Remarks—Larry Brown, NUPGE President

Brown thanked members for their work on the special committee and Smith for her leadership. Brown reiterated that NUPGE is seeking the special committee's advice on what NUPGE can do as a national body and as a family of unions to advance this issue. NUPGE also hopes the special committee will facilitate knowledge sharing.

Brown acknowledged that the second wave of COVID-19 infections is underway in many parts of Canada. Although we saw much public and political attention on sectors like child care and long-term care during the first wave, we have yet to see governments take sufficient action, and so the same systemic issues are arising in the second wave.

Advocates have long called for a national child care system, but we are in a unique political moment to make it a reality. Brown recalled that the consensus during the last special committee videoconference was that we must seize this moment.

In addition to the efforts on the child care file (see Section 4), Brown highlighted some of NUPGE's recent work. Examples include ongoing efforts to combat the provincial austerity that is anticipated, responding to the Speech from the Throne, and monitoring the upcoming federal budget.

3. Report on NUPGE Initiatives

Smith and Ibrahim summarized the NUPGE actions and initiatives that followed the special committee videoconference on July 9.

Given the interest that emerged during the July 9 videoconference in identifying allies, existing campaigns and initiatives, NUPGE compiled a scan of existing initiatives in Canada and distributed it to committee members.

During that videoconference, there was consensus around the need for national-level coordination in advocating for a high-quality child care system in Canada that is universally accessible, publicly funded and not-for-profit, and that fairly compensates its

workforce and enhances unionization. Following the meeting, Larry Brown sent a letter to Ahmed Hussen, the Minister of Families, Children, and Social Development, calling on the federal government to invest in such a system. The letter was amplified in a NUPGE website story and social media posts in July and again in September.

Building on this letter, NUPGE developed a letter template for Components to write Minister Hussen and their respective Premiers to collectively voice these demands.

NUPGE endorsed Child Care Now's [Strategy for Recovery](#), which acknowledges that child care must be core to the post-pandemic recovery and provides a roadmap for the federal government. NUPGE participated in a Child Care Now social media campaign to amplify the strategy ahead of the Speech from the Throne.

NUPGE is also participating in Child Care Now's virtual MP lobby. NUPGE circulated information to the National Executive Board and to the special committee, inviting Components to submit participant names. NUPGE is helping to coordinate participation by liaising between Child Care Now and Component representatives.

NUPGE is exploring possible follow-ups to these initiatives. NUPGE welcomed feedback and input from the special committee on possible next steps.

4. Roundtable: Component Updates on Child Care Situation

Committee members provided snapshots of the current child care situation in their provinces. What follows is a summary of the key discussion points and common issues.

Committee members shared updates on the COVID-19 caseload and public health regulations in their provinces. With the second wave of infections, many regions are seeing stricter regulations and more closures. The second wave is already straining the health care system and other public services. Several committee members also commented on the fatigue and sense of discouragement that is palpable among the membership and the public.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been extremely challenging for working parents. Whether they have been working from home, or on the front lines, child care is a concern.

Where schools and child care settings are open, it is common that children are sent home, and/or require testing, if they have COVID-19 symptoms. This presents challenges for working parents, especially those with limited or no sick leave. Many parents are having to use their sick time or vacation time, or leave their jobs altogether. Parents are worried, especially with cold and flu season only beginning.

Child care settings have implemented COVID-related protocols. The specific protocols vary, but common prevention and control measures include screening, cohorting,

staggered drop-offs, staggered meal and play times, personal protective equipment (PPE), and enhanced cleaning.

Committee members reported that the new regulations—and, in some cases, confusion surrounding the regulations—has added to the stress and workload of early childhood educators and other child care staff. Confusion and inconsistencies with the reporting of exposures have also created challenges for parents, staff, and their unions.

Members noted that some child care centres have remained closed throughout the pandemic, and that some have closed permanently. The committee discussed the possibility of a child care shortage after the pandemic. There are also reports of staff leaving the sector because of the stress and lack of resources, etc. Furthermore, it was pointed out that there may be competition for the labour force that works in child care, as other sectors, like health care, see increased investment and recruitment efforts.

In other cases, child care centres are open but operating under capacity, because parents have not yet returned to work or have chosen to keep their children at home. Relatedly, figures show that many women left the workforce during the pandemic due to child care responsibilities. Although spaces may be available right now, the high demand for child care spaces that existed before the pandemic is likely to return post-pandemic.

As with the availability of spaces, it was noted that while the impact of the pandemic on the child care sector is important, we must not forget about the myriad of issues in the system that already existed. They include cost, accessibility, and quality.

Although the pandemic has made the value of child care clearer than ever, some provincial governments are taking steps backwards. For example, the Ontario government has proposed worrying regulatory changes that would increase the children-to-staff ratio and reduce qualification requirements for staff. The threat of austerity in response to the pandemic is also a concern across Canada and could hurt the child care system. It will be important to continue to combat the austerity narrative.

Notably, there have been some encouraging developments at the provincial level. In the ongoing BC election, the 3 major political parties have announced some commitment to a provincial child care system. Building on its \$10-a-day program, the NDP in British Columbia has announced that it would move child care under the Ministry of Education. In Newfoundland and Labrador, the provincial government recently committed to implementing a \$25-a-day child care program in 2021.

5. Discussion: Next Steps

The committee discussed possible next steps for national-level coordination and advocacy regarding child care.

There was an emphasis on the need to continue to press the federal government on its role in establishing and funding a universal child care program. Despite the pushback from provincial governments regarding jurisdiction, the federal government has a role to play. Also, federal funding transfers to the provinces and territories for child care should be tied to specific measures or standards in order to avoid misuse, especially by right-wing provincial governments.

There was support for the idea that NUPGE would follow up on the letters to the federal government to maintain pressure on the Trudeau government's commitment to a national child care system, for example, by writing another letter.

As in the first special committee videoconference, members discussed the political opportunities of the moment. At the federal level, a minority government situation presents an opportunity. Child care champions or supporters, including those in opposition parties, may be particularly influential in this context.

At the time of writing, representatives of 4 Components have put their names forward to participate in the Child Care Now virtual lobby, and two meetings have taken place. Meetings are continuing through October, and so Components are encouraged to send any additional participant names to Nadia Ibrahim (nibrahim@nupge.ca).

There was also interest in lobbying on child care during the CLC lobby day.

Participants discussed the importance of sharing personal stories and experiences, whether through lobbying or in a campaign. For example, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario currently have a campaign that invites ECEs, staff, parents, and families [to share their stories](#).

There was interest in exploring the idea of targeting groups that may not traditionally be allies or champions of child care issues (e.g., Conservative MPs). There could be value in appealing to the child care challenges that families face across partisan lines.

Participants were invited to send any other ideas or materials to Nadia Ibrahim.



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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