

February 8, 2019

Councillor Gary Crawford, Chair

Members of the Budget Committee

2nd floor, Toronto City Hall

100 Queen Street West

Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Councillor Gary Crawford and Members of the Budget Committee,

Re: 2019 City Budget: Investing in Programs and Supports for Children Ages 6-12

Middle Childhood Matters Coalition Toronto (MCMCT) is an active group of concerned social service agencies, community members and parents who are actively promoting and influencing a system that prioritizes children ages 6 to 12 and their families. MCMCT has worked for more than 15 years to make Toronto a city where all children 6-12 years old and their families have equitable opportunities and resources to thrive.

In Toronto, many families are struggling to make ends meet. We hear firsthand from parents about how unaffordable Toronto is. About one quarter of children live in poverty. Many parents report spending a significant portion of their income on rent. We have the most expensive child care in the country. The unreliable transit system makes getting around difficult.

Toronto is a great city, but it could be better.

In this budget, we urge you to make choices to prioritize children and their families and improve their experiences in the city. We would like to provide the following comments and enhancements for your consideration:

- **Toronto Middle Childhood Strategy:** We urge you to ensure that the 2019 budget includes at least one full-time staff person dedicated to overseeing the review and implementation of this Strategy and related policies and initiatives. Middle childhood is an important stage in a child's life and the City has a valuable role to play in ensuring children receive high-quality supports and services. We are worried that progress in this area has been stagnant in recent years.
- **TO Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy:** Fully fund the commitments outlined in TO Prosperity in 2019 and develop targeted action plans to help children, youth and families who are most affected by poverty (indigenous families, racialized families, newcomers, and single parent families). Implementation of this strategy will ensure that children and youth have access to the necessities that they are entitled to and lead fulfilling and meaningful lives.

- **Recreation programs:** Additional recreation spaces are desperately needed to address the unmet demand represented in the growing waitlist. While the 2019 budget includes 7,500 new spaces as part of the 5-year Recreation Growth Strategy, this is only one-third of what was originally proposed for 2019 (25,000 spaces). We recommend that you to fully fund the all the new spaces outlined in the Growth Strategy.
- **Welcome Policy:** We are deeply concerned that the 2019 budget includes another \$600,000 decrease to the Welcome Policy. According to Children’s Services’ *2015-2019 Service Plan*, access to programming for children 6-12 is particularly challenging for newcomer families. Once again, we urge you to further investigate why there is not more significant uptake of the Welcome Policy. We believe this decline may be due to changes in 2012 where the policy when from a program credit to a dollar value subsidy.
- **Child care subsidies:** While the 2019 budget includes funding for 210 new child care subsidies, this is not enough (for example, 825 new child care subsidies were added in 2018). Almost 12,000 children are on the waiting list for subsidized child care. If the City wants to make a real dent in the wait list for child care subsidies, more subsidies need to be included in the 2019 budget.
- **Student Nutrition Program:** We are encouraged that the City has reached its target of funding 20% of the Student Nutrition Program. However, we strongly recommend that you to add the necessary funds to expand the Student Nutrition Program to independent schools. All students deserve access to this crucial program, no matter where they are located.

The 2019 budget is an opportunity for you, members of City Council, to invest in supports and services that will benefit children ages 6-12 and their families.

On behalf of the more than 180,000 children 6-12 in Toronto, we thank you in advance for making the decisions that will allow Toronto to be a fair and prosperous city for all. For more information about Middle Childhood Matters Coalition Toronto or to meet with us, please contact our project coordinator, Shaden Jebahi at shaden@middlechildhoodmatters.ca or 647-210-4105.

Sincerely,

Lee Soda

Middle Childhood Matters Coalition Toronto

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