

(Second Supplementary Order Paper)

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DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Máirt, 5 Deireadh Fómhair, 2021
Tuesday, 5th October, 2021

2 p.m.

GNÓ COMHALTAÍ PRÍOBHÁIDEACHA
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Fógra i dtaobh leasú ar Thairiscint : Notice of Amendment to Motion

187. “That Dáil Éireann:

notes that:

- childcare fees for parents in this State remain amongst the highest in the world;
- one of the largest financial expenses for parents is childcare fees, forcing many families into debt and financial crisis or out of their current employment;
- a recent United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund survey found that some families can spend up to one half of a salary to pay for two children in childcare;
- parents, particularly women, are not supported with an adequate childcare infrastructure to facilitate their return to work after childbirth;
- early years workers, who are highly qualified professionals, are paid some of the lowest wages of any sector, with many employed on or just above the minimum wage; and
- Covid-19 has intensified the pressure on providers, launching them into a new world of regulations, which has resulted in acute staffing pressures and has played a significant factor in staff retention;

calls on the Government to commit to delivering a State childcare system in Budget 2022 which:

- reduces centre-based childcare fees for parents by at least one-third of current average fees next year and two-thirds thereafter;
- improves the pay and conditions of workers in the sector to ensure that entry-level positions provide for that of a living wage;
- implements pay scales and full continuous professional development for all staff which properly values childcare as a viable long-term career choice; and
- ensures all children and their families have access to good quality and affordable childcare; and

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furthermore calls on the Government, within Budget 2022 parameters, to:

- develop a network of Child Contact Centres across the State;
- reinstate the Childminder Advisory Officer Service including the appointment of Childminder Advisory Officers in each Child Contact Centre; and
- increase the Childminder Development Grant by 50 per cent from €1,000 to €1,500.”
— *Kathleen Funchion, Chris Andrews, John Brady, Martin Browne, Pat Buckley, Matt Carthy, Sorca Clarke, Rose Conway-Walsh, Réada Cronin, Seán Crowe, David Cullinane, Pa Daly, Pearse Doherty, Paul Donnelly, Dessie Ellis, Mairéad Farrell, Thomas Gould, Johnny Guirke, Martin Kenny, Claire Kerrane, Pádraig Mac Lochlainn, Mary Lou McDonald, Denise Mitchell, Imelda Munster, Johnny Mythen, Eoin Ó Broin, Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire, Ruairí Ó Murchú, Louise O'Reilly, Darren O'Rourke, Aengus Ó Snodaigh, Maurice Quinlivan, Patricia Ryan, Brian Stanley, Pauline Tully, Mark Ward, Violet-Anne Wynne.*

Leasú:

Amendment:

1. To delete all words after “Dáil Éireann” and substitute the following:

“acknowledges:

- the challenges faced by the early learning and childcare sector;
- the particular challenges presented by Covid-19 for the sector and the tremendous efforts by early learning and childcare professionals and service providers during this period to keep services open and safe;

notes that investment in the sector has increased by 141 per cent since 2015 and welcomes the commitment by Government to build on this by at least doubling investment in early learning and childcare by 2028;

recognises:

- the substantial State supports that have been provided to the sector throughout the pandemic that have enabled services to operate safely and ensured that the increased costs associated with public health requirements and with lower demand were not passed on to parents, the supports provided include:
 - a continuation of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth subsidy schemes on an *ex-gratia* basis (12th March – 5th April, 2020);
 - the Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme (TWSCS) (6th April – 28th June, 2020) which cost approximately €50 million;
 - the Reopening Funding Package for Childcare Services (29th June – 23rd August, 2020) that included a €14.2 million capital grant, an €18 million Reopening Support Payment, in addition to the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme and resumption of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth subsidy schemes;
 - the July Jobs Stimulus package that included the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme (EWSS) (which cost approximately €22 million per month at standard rates and €34 million per month at enhanced rates), a Sustainability Support Fund and a full resumption of the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (from 24th August to end of December 2020); and
 - tailored funding arrangements to respond to Level 5 restrictions in the post-Christmas period, that included a new €12 million Covid-19 Operating

Support Payment and a new Covid-19 strand of the Sustainability Support Fund, in addition to the EWSS, that allowed services to continue to operate on a sustainable basis for children of essential workers and vulnerable children, while not charging parents who were not accessing services during this period;

- that early learning and childcare employers continue to be entitled to access the EWSS with an exemption to having to demonstrate the drop in turnover that applies to other sectors and since October 2020, EWSS has been paid at enhanced rates and these rates are estimated to cover, on average, 80 per cent of staff costs in the sector, or 50 per cent of total operating costs; and the cost of this measure is €34 million per month;
- that there is strong evidence of the effectiveness of these supports, including:
 - the data on services that have closed and opened in 2020 are directly comparable to 2019 so there has been no loss of capacity;
 - data from the Office of the Revenue Commissioners indicates that the number of employees in the sector has not changed substantially over the course of the pandemic; and
 - data from the Annual Early Years Sector Profile Survey reveals there have been no significant increase in fees charged to parents;

welcomes the commitments in the Programme for Government to:

- establish an agency, Childcare Ireland, to assist in the expansion of high quality childcare, spearheading leadership, best practice and innovation, and professional development in community and private settings;
- continue to invest in the National Childcare Scheme, reducing costs for parents and introducing greater parental choice and flexibility;
- reform the childcare system to create one that brings together the best of community and private childcare provision, is focused on children's rights and quality outcomes, reduces inequalities, supports staff retention, and substantially reduces costs to parents, in consultation with providers, staff, and parents;
- ensure sustainability within the Early Learning and Care and School-Age Care sector, by fast-tracking the work of the Expert Group in considering a new funding model;
- examine the approach of other European countries to set a cap on parental fees, irrespective of income;
- support the establishment of a Joint Labour Committee in the childcare sector and the drawing up of an Employment Regulation Order, which would determine minimum rates of pay for childcare workers, as well as terms and conditions of employment; and
- extend paid parental leave for parents, to allow them to spend more time with their baby during the first year;

further acknowledges and welcomes the significant progress made to deliver on these commitments, including:

- the introduction and roll out of the National Childcare Scheme to provide subsidies to 80,000 children and reduce costs to parents as well as the review of the Scheme which has recently been completed and will be shortly laid before the Oireachtas;
- the development of a new funding model by end 2021 that will ensure additional investment committed by Government will reduce the costs to parents, ensure

additional supports can be provided to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, compensate providers so that they can deliver early learning and childcare on a sustainable and high-quality basis, and attract and retain a well-qualified workforce;

- the development of a workforce development plan for the sector by the end of 2021 that will ensure appropriate numbers of early learning and childcare professionals, support the achievement of qualification targets for the workforce, establish role profiles and a career framework and set out plans to develop a national system of continuing professional development;
- the launch and initial implementation of a National Action Plan for Childminding, that sets out a phased approach to bringing childminders within the scope of State funded supports and regulation over the period 2021-2028, with regional Childminding Development Officers already working with city and county Childcare Committees to provide local-level supports to childminders and commitments to review and reform financial supports for childminding such as the Childminder Development Grant;
- the introduction of regulations for School-Age Childcare, and the publication in September 2020 of National Quality Guidelines for School-Age Childcare Services;
- the recent establishment of a Joint Labour Committee in the early learning and childcare sector to draw up an Employment Regulation Order, which would determine minimum rates of pay for early learning and childcare professionals, as well as terms and conditions of employment; and
- the recognition of early learning and childcare as a strategic investment priority in the revised National Development Plan with significant funding earmarked to increase capacity in the sector in the coming four years;

further notes that the European Commission has welcomed ‘the major efforts and targeted investments in early childhood education and care, which have clear milestones and a plan for evaluation and follow-up’ and encouraged Ireland to ‘maintain the momentum of reforms in improving affordability, access and quality of ECEC’; and

while noting that further developments and investment are required, recognises that there are many positive and progressive elements to the current early learning and childcare sector and acknowledges the planning and preparation that have been undertaken to progress reforms in the sector in the coming years.” — *An tAire Leanaí, Comhionannais, Michumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige.*