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April 18, 2006

The Right Honourable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear Mr. Harper,

The Ontario Public Health Association is mandated to provide leadership on issues affecting the health of the public. We believe that early child development investment is a strategy to long-term prevention of social, health, and economic problems in our country and to building the capacity of individuals and society.

We understand that your government plans to move quickly to implement the new Choice in Child Care Allowance, which will provide parents with an allowance of less than \$5.00 per day per child, a mere fraction of the cost for families whose desire is to have their children attend quality child care programs in a safe stimulating environment. While it is true that parents need income supports, they also need quality regulated child care.

You subsequently announced that the Government of Canada is phasing out the early learning and childcare agreements signed by the previous government with the provincial and territorial governments. The implication of this is a concern to OPHA. We strongly believe that quality early learning and child care has positive health outcomes, and further, that many of the problematic social and health issues dealt with in adolescence and early adulthood could be prevented or minimized with a solid comprehensive early child development support program. We urge you to maintain the provincial agreements to fulfill the strategy to support families with real structural solutions that enable employment.

If the original agreement with the province of Ontario is cancelled, all of the Best Start planning already underway in municipalities across Ontario will fall apart. Parents have been looking forward to new school-based, safe, quality childcare spaces and additional supports for children with special needs. We see this as an important child welfare and health promotion issue and ask that you also consider it as such, by honouring the agreements made during the government's previous term.

Yours truly,

Dr. Garry Aslanyan
President, Ontario Public Health Association

cc. Hon. Dalton McGuinty, Premier, Ontario
Hon. Mary Anne Chambers, Minister of Children & Youth Services, Ontario
Hon. George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Hon. Jack Layton, Leader, New Democratic Party
Hon. Bill Graham, Acting Leader, Liberal Party