

## **City targets minister in playground dispute: Votes to display signs at child-care centres over safety issue**

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Toronto councillors are seeking to embarrass Ontario Community and Social Services Minister John Baird over playground safety.

Councillors spent most of yesterday morning railing at the provincial government for insisting on safety improvements in playgrounds without supplying the \$35 million needed to carry them out.

In a surprise move, council voted 25-13 that each substandard site be temporarily named "The Honourable John Baird 'Unsafe' Playground."

Affected are 718 playgrounds at licensed child-care centres governed by the province's Day Nurseries Act.

The law requires playground equipment be safe, and the government recently decreed that means it must comply with tough Canadian Standards Association rules issued in May, 1998.

Since January, 1997, there have been 958 reported injuries at child-care centres - about half on outdoor playgrounds - including cuts requiring sutures, broken bones and concussions, a city staff report said.

Falls from climbing equipment accounted for 30 per cent of the playground-related injuries, it noted.

Since the higher standards took effect Sept. 30, two Toronto day-care centres have removed equipment over concerns about liability and insurance coverage.

"The standards have gone up a big notch. The operators are required to meet them and without funding. They can't do it," community services commissioner Shirley Hoy told council.

Councillors said they agree safer equipment is necessary, but they want the province to help pay for it.

Queen's Park, which pays 80 per cent of day-care subsidies, stopped regular funding for playground equipment in 1994. Funding has been limited and sporadic since then, the staff report said.

Councillor Howard Moscoe (North York Spadina) volunteered to supply signs at his own expense targeting Baird.

Moscoe said signs will go up at the 57 centres run by the city, while operators of the other 661 affected centres will be given the option of displaying Baird signs.

Baird refused to be drawn into a war of words and defended his government's record of backing child care.

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