

Province may fund playground work; [1 Edition]

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Queen's Park is negotiating with Toronto to share the \$35 million cost of improving safety standards at 718 playgrounds in licensed child-care centres.

If the money comes through, signs recently posted at some facilities naming them "The Honourable John Baird Unsafe Playground" will be removed.

The province recently decreed that playgrounds at licensed day-care centres must comply with tough new Canadian Standards Association safety rules issued last year.

A city staff report says phasing in the standards over seven years would cost about \$35 million, but the province did not offer to help the city pay.

City councillors were so angry about having to fund the improvements that they voted last month to temporarily name the playgrounds after Baird, the social services minister.

Councillor Howard Moscoe, who owns a sign company, had the signs made up at his own expense. He arranged to have them posted at 57 city-run centres, while operators of the other 661 centres were given the option of displaying the signs.

After hearing that the city is now talking to the province about sharing the cost, Moscoe (North York Spadina) said he will have the signs removed.

"It shows that gonzo or confrontational politics sometimes works," Moscoe said. "As I understand it, they are presently looking at splitting the costs 50-50."

Baird could not be reached for comment.

Since January, 1997, there have been 958 reported injuries at child-care centres, about half on playgrounds.

Shirley Hoy, the city's community services commissioner, confirmed discussion is taking place with the province.

"I think they are prepared to cost-share with the city, particularly on some of the critical areas, where licences are up for renewal."

Credit: CITY HALL BUREAU