

November 22, 2023



Members of the Senate of Canada

Re: Immediate Action Required: Transforming Childcare Inclusion in Bill C-35

Introduction: A Mother's Perspective

Dear Senators,

I am Robin Acton, President of Inclusion Canada. Today, I reach out to you not just in my professional role, but as a mother whose life is deeply intertwined with the world of disabilities. We stand at a crucial juncture with Bill C-35, a legislation that has the potential to redefine early learning and child care in Canada. However, it currently overlooks a fundamental aspect – the genuine inclusion of children with disabilities.

The Current Challenge in Canadian Childcare

For over six decades, Inclusion Canada has been a voice for individuals with intellectual disabilities. My personal journey, however, brings a different perspective. As a mother of Erin, a bright and capable daughter with an intellectual disability, I've witnessed firsthand the transformative power of an inclusive education system. Erin's success is a beacon of hope, yet such success stories are far too rare, largely due to systemic gaps in our current childcare system.

A startling fact remains – only about 20% of Canadian early learning and childcare centers are equipped to fully include children with disabilities. This shortfall is not merely a policy gap; it is a significant fissure in our societal fabric that needs urgent mending. While Bill C-35 acknowledges the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), it falls short of embedding the necessary measures to ensure inclusive childcare, a critical factor in enabling children like Erin to flourish.

Inclusion Canada appreciates the recognition of some of our concerns, as recently cited in the "Observation Report" of SOCI's study on C-35. We value that the committee shares our concerns on proper data monitoring and ensuring proper supports to enable equal opportunity and inclusive access. We are pleased to see the reference to applying the principles of the UNCRPD and Article 24 on inclusive

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education and reference to our proper definition of inclusion. We feel we have indeed been heard by the committee, which we very much appreciate. However, without having these issues corrected by amending the legislation, the observations are just that. It is difficult to understand why the Senate SOCI committee, or the government, would not have amended C-35 to address these valid concerns. There is still time to act.

Call to Action: Amending Bill C-35 for True Inclusion
Immediate Action Needed:

The time to act is now. We urge the full Senate to champion amendments to Bill C-35, that unambiguously defines 'inclusion' and aligns it with the CRPD framework. Such amendments are not just a legislative change; it's a commitment to building an inclusive future for all our children.

Inclusion Canada is urging all Senators to take critical and serious reflection of the glaring omissions in C-35. This is a real opportunity for the Senate to fix the oversights in the bill. We are hoping at Third Reading the Senate will see the error and make necessary amendments. Previously, we provided recommended amendments in a brief to SOCI. **Three straightforward amendments to fix this issue can be found in this link:** [C-35 Amendments](#)

A Future Defined by Inclusivity and Equality

This plea transcends beyond the mere passing of a bill. It's about crafting a society where every child, irrespective of their perceived abilities, is provided with opportunities to learn, develop, and thrive in an environment enriched with diversity and equality.

Without these amendments, we jeopardize more of the same whereby fully inclusive early learning will not be prioritized or universal. This is not good enough and we need better. Inclusive policy choices now will prevent our children with disabilities from losing out on critical early childhood development that will help them thrive in the future. High-quality, affordable, equitable, and fully inclusive early learning and childcare is not an option, but a necessity. All our children are counting on us.



I urge you, esteemed Senators, in one final plea, to take a stand – for Erin, for every child who deserves a fair chance, and for a future where disability does not equate to disadvantage. Inclusion Canada stands ready to assist in this endeavor, driven by a firm belief that our collective actions today will profoundly shape the moral fabric of our nation.

With utmost sincerity and hope,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Robin Acton", written in a cursive style.

Robin Acton
President
Inclusion Canada