

【Aim to reduce the number of children on the waiting list in 2022】

Hello, I'm OMORI Masao, Mayor of Okayama.

The other day, we announced that the number of children waiting to enter authorized day care centers in Okayama City has reached 259 as of April this year. We have committed to reduce this figure for three consecutive years since the peak of 849 in 2017, however, we were unable to achieve our goal of the zero children on waiting list. We are sorry to all the citizens.

The factor was caused by the increase in the number of applicants for day care services due to the government's program to make early education and day care free of charge and the inability to eliminate a dearth of day care staff.

Now, let's look back on the measures for the children waiting for day care facilities so far. In 2016, I revised the definition of the number of the children on the waiting list to make it more realistic from the user's perspective. Until then, for example, if there was a vacancy in a remote day care facility that you would have to drive for 30 minutes in the opposite direction to the work place, the idea was that the children on the waiting list would be zero even if there were hundreds of people who were in trouble to enroll in a nearby day care facility. This was renewed to include the children who were not able to enter a day care center in the children on the waiting list although it is adjusted the entrance hearing user's first to third choices. By reviewing this definition, the number of children on the waiting list in Okayama City has jumped significantly to 729 in 2016 and 849 in 2017, but in the truest sense, we have been able to clarify the specific target figures that should be eliminated in order to create an environment where citizens can raise a family without fearing.

Moreover, at the city council held in February, 2017, I have declared to put the zero children waiting into practical in April this year, and we have worked on improvement of day care centers and securing the number of day care staff. As a result of the hard work of the preparation for day care facilities,

considering the effects of the free early education and day care services associated with the consumption tax hike, we were able to exceed the number of applicants for admission in April this year.

However, we could not secure the number of day care staff we demanded. As improvement of working conditions for day care staff, the effects of a pay raise, a subsidy of rental housing and a repayment subsidy of scholarship, what we have been conducting in Okayama City's individual way so far, have steadily appeared. An average of 170 new staff have been newly added each year since 2016, but it was not enough to meet the total demand. I believe that the reason behind this is that there is an insufficiency of staff nationwide due to the impact of the free early education and day care services and a competition for having them among regions have escalated.

Now, we will set an object to zero the number of the children on the waiting list for day care centers by April, 2022 and particularly focus on making sure of the number of day care staff. We will contend with preventing an employee turnover and improving a childcare environment as well as continuing to implement the city's own measures such as an increase of 3% of wages, we will commit to secure the number of staff and offer a comprehensive environment for child-rearing.