

Disappearing day care ^[1]

A consortium of newsroom has found the number of childcare deserts in Michigan is double what policymakers quote.

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Excerpts

It was March 27, 2021, and an at-home day care in Grand Rapids was ready for a pool day. The day care's owner took seven children — five of whom were just 2 and 3 years old — to a nearby Holiday Inn Express. She bought a room to use the hotel's splash pad and two indoor pools, and charged parents \$25 per child.

None of the children had life jackets or arm floaties. The caregiver, Melanie Williams, was the only adult overseeing the seven children. At the time, Michigan law required one adult for every six children at licensed at-home day cares. That rule has since been relaxed by state lawmakers.

At 6:38 p.m., one of the smaller children — identified only as "Child P" in state investigators' reports — ran away from the kiddie pools and climbed into the larger adult pool.

Four minutes later, the girl's head was underwater, her lips blue, her eyes open, lying flat on her back, witnesses said.

She wasn't breathing and had no pulse.

Luckily, an off-duty paramedic and an off-duty nurse on vacation with their own children were nearby, and pulled the child out of the water, surveillance footage shows. Another adult ushered the other children away, later telling investigators that he didn't want them to watch a child die.

Child P survived, but her brush with drowning underscores the stakes as Michigan's child care industry deteriorates. Overwhelmed by demand, Michigan's child care industry is in full-blown crisis, according to "Disappearing Day Care," a 10-month-long investigation by MuckRock and a consortium of Michigan newsrooms. Reporters collected years of investigative reports by Michigan's child care licensing bureau, testimonials from hundreds of parents and providers and analyzed new state child care data provided as part of pandemic federal relief programs.

The data and documents show the problem is even worse than policymakers thought.

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