

Safety at day cares defended: Quality same at for-profit and non-profit: official [CA-AB] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Safety is no more a problem at private day cares than non-profit ones, the Edmonton spokesman for Alberta's Child and Family Services Authority said Friday.

That assessment, from spokesman Ron Bos, came one day after the authority closed the south-side Bear's Paw Day Care Centre after two incidents involving child safety. In January, the authority shut down the privately owned facility's infant room when a six-month-old asthmatic baby was left alone in a crib for three hours after staff forgot about him and locked up for the night.

On Wednesday, a 20-month-old toddler was left alone in an enclosed outdoor play area, prompting the day care's closure.

It is only the third Alberta day care to be issued a "stop order" in the last 20 years, a move that forces a facility to close immediately.

The federal government's new day-care plan has raised questions over whether private or not-for-profit day cares offers better service. On Friday, some government critics said allowing a profit motive in day care encourages owners to cut corners.

Child and Family Services does not track rule violations in Alberta day cares on the basis of non-profit or for-profit, Bos said. But he said the authority has seen nothing that indicates there is a difference between the two.

There are 506 licensed day cares in Alberta, 241 in the Edmonton area.

Day care in Alberta is currently split with about two-thirds commercially run and the rest non-profit. A few years ago about 80 per cent were private, Bos said.

Each day care is visited at least twice a year by one of the 45 licensing officers in the province. They will visit a day care more frequently if there are complaints or concerns noted by inspectors. There are 12 licensing officers assigned to the Edmonton area.

NDP Leader Brian Mason said the Bear's Paw stop-order points to problems, and he criticized the government for its refusal to support national child care standards.

"I think it's important the standards be applied across the board and we eliminate profit when it comes to care of children, so there's no cutting of corners when it comes to care our children receive or their safety," Mason said.

But some in the child care field believe Alberta's new voluntary accreditation program is a good start.

About 200 day-care centres in the province have applied for accreditation. Bear's Paw was not one of them, Bos said.

Bear's Paw owner Bonita Berezanski said Friday she was still investigating what happened and declined further comment. Bear's Paw will continue to operate its after-school care program, which is licensed separately.

- reprinted from the Edmonton Journal

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