

Parents hope lawsuit against Ont. ministry will prevent further daycare deaths ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

The parents of a toddler who died at an unlicensed Vaughan, Ont. daycare last month have launched a multimillion-dollar lawsuit against the daycare and the province.

Speaking to the media, Ekaterina Evtopova, Vyacheslav Ravikovich and their lawyer Patrick Brown said that the purpose of seeking a \$3.5-million settlement is to prevent further deaths.

In early July, 21-month-old Eva Ravikovich was pronounced dead after York region police were called to the home daycare she'd been attending for a year, located near Dufferin Street and Highway 407.

Though the cause of death hasn't been released, the family said they were told the girl's death was "100 per cent preventable." They declined to elaborate since a police investigation is ongoing.

"They are two parents that have gone through an absolute nightmare," Brown said. "And it becomes even more tragic when you find out that the death of your child was preventable."

"My daughter was everything to me," Evtopova said. "As a parent, I tried to provide everything I could to my little girl."

The daycare, which was recommended to the couple by people Evtopova knew, offered pick-up and drop-off services, so Evtopova said she and her husband did not enter the daycare on the day their daughter died. The toddler was "absolutely healthy" and smiling when she was picked up by a daycare employee from home.

"Every child to every parent is a special one, but this girl was just amazing," she said. "She was a mature person inside a little body ... Now I have a feeling that I have nothing to live for."

Evtopova said she made a routine call to the daycare during the day to see how her daughter was doing, and did not get the impression that anything was wrong. Later, her husband received a call and went straight to the daycare "just to find that our child was dead."

Evtopova and Ravikovich launched the lawsuit after it was revealed by a Ministry of Education spokesperson that three complaints had already been filed about the number of children attending the daycare, but only the last one was followed up on. Before their daughter's death, Evtopova said she was not aware of any of the complaints about the daycare.

Governments take on certain responsibilities to monitor and investigate unlicensed daycares, Brown said, and as a "watchdog," they are accountable when things go wrong. "There is a long line of cases in regard to government responsibility."

Brown said the government was negligent by "not only not following up with complaints, but also by (not) making publicly known the information they had about this daycare."

"We also know already that two ministry employees have been suspended as a result of the complaints made about this daycare," Brown said.

Evtopova said she's constantly revisiting the death of her daughter. She compares her grief to the plot of "Groundhog Day," "where you wake up every morning, you wake up to the same thing again."

Brown said the lawsuit is an opportunity for the family to find the closure they need, but will also serve as a warning to other daycare operators. Punitive damages are meant to deter other operators from similar situations.

"I do not want it to happen to any other parent, or any other family, any other kid," Evtopova said at a press conference. "This is my job now, to try to prevent this from happening."

The daycare was investigated in November 2012, when its operator was told to reduce the number of children under the age of 10 being cared for in order to comply with the law. Home-based child-care providers can only take care of a maximum of five children under the age of 10, in addition to any of their own.

Police say there were 27 children at the daycare when Ravikovich died.

Public health officials investigated the Vaughan daycare after the child's death and uncovered health hazards related to food safety and infection prevention. The daycare was closed down because of concerns about sanitary conditions.

-reprinted from CTV News

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