

Most complaints about daycare where toddler died went unanswered: ministry ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

Ontario's Ministry of Education failed to follow up on four of five complaints made against an unlicensed daycare north of Toronto where a two-year-old girl died last month.

Ministry officials visited the Yellowwood Circle daycare in Vaughan after a complaint was made in November 2012, Education Minister Liz Sandals said Friday.

An order was issued to the provider to reduce the number of children after officials found seven kids in the daycare - two more than permitted, she said in an interview.

Another complaint was made the following month, but wasn't followed up with a visit to the daycare, the Guelph MPP said.

It's "disappointing" that most of the complaints weren't followed up with a visit within five business days as required, Sandals said.

"Even at that point, the number of children who were present in November of 2012 seemed to be dramatically lower than the number of children found in July when the incident happened," she said.

Unlicensed daycare providers in Ontario can legally care for no more than five children under the age of 10 - in addition to their own children.

A lawyer representing the dead toddler's parents said there were at least 27 children in the daycare when the child died.

In addition to those complaints against Yellowwood Circle, two other complaints were received by the ministry in May 2012 and one in October 2012. None were followed with a site visit.

The ministry is now applying for an injunction to prevent the Yellowwood Circle provider in Vaughan - where Eva Ravikovich died - from operating a daycare in the province, she said.

Monique Taylor, NDP critic for children and youth services, called it "appalling" that four complaints were not investigated.

Ravikovich's family, and others whose children went to Yellowwood Circle, must be "horrified" that the government failed to show up four out of five times, she said in a statement.

"Parents deserve to know that their children are in safe hands," Taylor said.

The ministry failed to answer 25 of 448 complaints made about unlicensed daycares between Jan. 1, 2012, and July 12, 2013, Sandals said.

But the ministry's performance improved this year, where only one of 173 complaints weren't addressed promptly, she added.

"I think the side-effect of looking back and seeing if there were complaints that hadn't been addressed, what we have found is that the record this year in 2013 has been a significant improvement on the 2012 record," she said.

The ministry said it received 274 complaints about unlicensed daycares in 2012, with the Greater Toronto Area at the top of the list with 110 complaints.

But it failed to follow up with site visits for 24 complaints - 18 in Barrie, which includes Vaughan, two in London and four in Ottawa - until this year.

There have been 174 complaints made so far this year, including 82 in the GTA, one of which wasn't followed up with a site visit. There were no complaints about Yellowwood Circle, Sandals said.

The ministry has investigated all the unanswered complaints "thoroughly" and has confirmed that all the daycare providers are complying with the law, she said.

Three ministry employees were suspended after it was discovered that a number of complaints had gone unanswered.

Ombud Andre Marin has launched an investigation into whether the government is doing enough to protect children in unlicensed daycares.

Ravikovich's parents have launched a \$3.5-million lawsuit against the ministry and the owners and operators of the daycare.

They allege the daycare was an unsafe environment and the operators failed to both monitor children for potential health issues and respond properly to an emergency situation.

They also say the ministry failed to ensure complaints against unlicensed home child care facilities were made available to the public.

Sandals said the government is working on an online system where parents can access information about complaints. Until the system is up and running, parents can call their regional ministry office and staff will find the information for them.

-reprinted from the Record

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: unregulated ^[3]

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