

Child advocates call for overhaul of private day homes after Calgary sex assault case ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

The latest sexual assault case involving a private day home has led more child care advocates and agencies to call for changes to the way such businesses are operated in Alberta.

"It just doesn't seem right," said Cheryl Crowther, of Child Development Dayhomes of Alberta, an organization which oversees 155 approved and accredited day homes in the Calgary area.

"It just seems so absurd that you can charge somebody and still let this continue."

The most recent case involves a 69-year-old Calgary man charged with sexual assault against three children in a Midnapore day home.

Last month, a 46-year-old man was charged with sexual assault against a young child at a private facility in the city's northwest.

The provincial government should completely reassess the private day-home system because of the lack of standards, Crowther says.

She points out that private day home operators are allowed to look after more children than licensed ones. If someone living in a private day home has been charged, as in the most recent case in the Midnapore day home, there's no way to shut it down.

"Something that is not monitored, there's no safety in place, there's no checks, there's nothing in place, that perhaps they should be allowed less children."

Rules stricter at licensed operations

Licensed child care operators are subject to much more stringent rules, and would be closed immediately in similar circumstances, she says.

"So even if there's an allegation of something, if a parent makes a serious concern we are out right away investigating to see what's going on."

Geri Bemister, director of operations with the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre, shares those concerns.

"There should be an investigation that happens, an initial investigation, and services should be halted at that point, until we know that children are safe." While she acknowledges that everyone is allowed due process under the law, the safety of children should be the utmost concern.

"That ensures that those children are being [kept safe] in the interim."

There are steps that any parent can take before choosing a day home, according to Crowther. They include ensuring providers have undergone screening and security clearances, know first aid and follow the Canada Food Guide.

Parents can find approved agencies on a Calgary childcare website, "and make sure they go with their gut feeling as well, that everything is fine, and they're doing their own checks to see what's happening in the homes, because it's just not worth the risk."

Minister of Human Services Irfan Sabir says the province is working on a plan to expand access to more regulated affordable childcare.

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Region: Alberta ^[3]

Tags: children's rights ^[4]

home-based ^[5]

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