

USA TODAY SECURITY ZONE SET UP
AROUND JET CRASH IN UKRAINE **PAGE 1B**

**TOO HOT,
TOO WET
TO PLAY
OUTSIDE?
FIND FUN INDOORS**
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The Journal News
Sunday

BREAKING NEWS 24/7 AT LOHUD.COM

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PROGRAMS FINED, LICENSES REVOKED

DAY CARE SCOLDINGS

The Office of Children and Family Services fined the following local day care providers in 2013 for violating state child care regulations

MLK DAY CARE, MONSEY

INADEQUATE SUPERVISION

Other violations: over capacity and failure to cooperate with inspectors

\$2,500 FINE

BEDFORD DISCOVERY EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER, BEDFORD HILLS

INADEQUATE SUPERVISION

\$500 FINE

RAMS DAY CARE, SPRING VALLEY

INSUFFICIENT TRAINING

Other violations: missing safety barriers, inadequate fire safety

\$350 FINE

NYACK CENTER, NYACK

INADEQUATE INSPECTIONS

Other violations: inadequate registrations, insufficient training

\$300 FINE

DENISE APREA, THORNWOOD

INADEQUATE SUPERVISION

Other violations: portable heater use, record keeping

\$300 FINE

KLEIN'S DAYCARE, MONSEY

MISTREATMENT/ABUSE

Other violations: record keeping, inadequate supervision

\$250 FINE

MALKA UNGAR, NEW SQUARE

NO CPR TRAINING CERTIFICATE

Other violations: no current first aid training certificate

\$200 FINE

"The vast majority are certainly safe and are meeting most of the regulatory requirements, but we want to see nothing but high-quality programs."

KATHY HALAS,
Child Care Council
of Westchester

State inspectors reprimanded 20 Lower Hudson centers for breaking the rules last year

By Ernie Garcia
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Losing a child on a field trip and failure to report child abuse are some of the violations that got local day care centers in trouble last year.

State officials with the Office of Children and Family Services fined or revoked the licenses of 20 day care centers in 2013 in Putnam, Rockland and Westchester counties. The most common violation that led to license revocations was the failure to get proper training.

Other local day care centers had their licenses revoked for supervision and maintenance issues, according to data obtained by The Journal News through a Freedom of Information Law request. State inspectors aim to visit day care centers four times a year and they find violations in many of the region's day care centers.

Day care providers typically correct their violations during the inspectors' visits or by follow-up inspections, according to the OCFS's website, which offers the public a child care center database that includes a violations history. The day care programs that have repeat violations for the same issues are the ones that lose their licenses or get fined.

The region's biggest fine of \$2,500 was in Rockland County and it was assessed to MLK Day Care Inc., a group family day care center in Monsey with a capacity of 12 children ages 6 weeks to 12 years plus four additional school-aged children. MLK's

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Kids enjoy time in the playground at Green Chimneys day care center in Patterson. Day care centers throughout the region were fined for violations ranging from failure to get proper training to maintenance issues. FRANK BECERRA JR./THE JOURNAL NEWS

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violations on Aug. 15 included leaving children without competent care, leaving children in the care of other children, not having enough caretakers for infants and failing to cooperate with OCFS inspectors.

"The safety of the children in our care is our top priority which is why we work closely with the state to ensure all guidelines are being followed," said Moses Kestenbaum, MLK's owner, in an email.

Kathy Halas of the Child Care Council of Westchester, a group that offers free counseling and advice to parents seeking child care, said it's a red flag if day care centers don't want to discuss their regulatory history.

"We encourage parents who call us to go on the OCFS website and see what's on there and then have a discussion with the child care program to find out what happened," said Halas, the council's executive director. "You get more information about what may have triggered that violation and you can figure out the openness of the program."

Dianne Garcia, owner of the Alpha Beta Child Development Program in Mount Vernon, was candid and dismayed about her license revocation. Garcia said her program inadvertently left a child at a Chuck E. Cheese's restaurant in what Garcia described as a case of mistaken identity. Garcia said the child was not hurt or in any danger.

"People (sought) us out because of our trips and because of what we (did). It still hurts. Of course that was not my proudest moment," said Garcia, who now helps her mother with another day care program that doesn't take trips. "We concluded it's safer to lock the kids in the house and watch TV rather than do the development stuff."

Most day care centers in the region don't run afoul of state inspectors.

Halas noted that in Westchester County alone there are 760 registered child care programs. State officials only took enforcement action against eight Westchester County programs in 2013.

State inspectors look for health and safety issues at day care programs, but their inspections don't evaluate the providers on the quality of their programs.

"The vast majority are certainly safe and are meeting most of the regulatory requirements, but we want to see nothing but high-quality programs," Halas said.

The biggest Westchester County fine, \$500, was assessed to the Bedford Discovery Early Childhood Center for failing to provide adequate supervision, according to state officials. Other violations listed on the OCFS website for the Bedford Discovery center include a Nov. 18 failure to report child abuse.

Owner Kerri Pritchett disputed the violations.

"That child is still currently enrolled



The former location of the Alpha Beta Child Development Program in Mount Vernon. The program's license was suspended and revoked in 2013 after staffers left a child in their care behind on a field trip. THE JOURNAL NEWS



The building that houses the MLK Day Care program in Monsey. MLK Day Care was fined \$2,500 in 2013 for violations including leaving children without competent care, leaving children in the care of other children, not having enough caretakers for infants and failing to cooperate with state inspectors. THE JOURNAL NEWS



The Bedford Discovery Early Childhood Center was fined \$500 by the state in 2013 for failure to provide adequate supervision. THE JOURNAL NEWS



"I think the regulations are there for a good purpose. They keep us all in line, but (state inspectors) have to have the same consistency of review."

JOSEPH WHALEN,
Green Chimneys
executive director

MORE DAY CARE DISCIPLINE

The Office of Children and Family Services fined the following local day care providers in 2013 for violating state child care regulations:

\$200

Meline Merjanian, Valley Cottage, inadequate supervision, safety hazards, record keeping

\$100

Safe-N-Sound Childcare, Pearl River, overcrowding, inadequate supervision, record keeping

\$100

Happy Tots Child Care, Cortlandt, licensing, child privacy, corporal punishment

\$100

Green Chimneys Nature's Nursery, Patterson, record keeping

in our program," Pritchett said of what she called an unsubstantiated allegation, though she declined to discuss details about her violations.

Ellen Cohen, 36, of Mount Kisco has two daughters, a preschooler and an infant, at the Mount Kisco Child Care Center. It didn't occur to her to check the state's OCFS website while researching places to send her daughters about three and a half years ago.

"Wow, I really should have done that, check to see if there are any lawsuits," said Cohen.

Westchester County Court records do not show any lawsuits against the Mount Kisco Child Care Center.

Cohen and her husband wanted a center that was diverse and offered nutritional, physical and intellectual enrichment. Cohen asked neighbors and one of them recommended the Mount Kisco center.

Cohen said she's seen rules governing day care centers in action.

Before a diaper change, Cohen saw a staffer wash her hands, the baby's hands and the surface where the baby was to be changed. The staffer put on gloves, removed the soiled diaper, changed gloves to put on the fresh diaper then washed her hands again, among other steps.

Halas said word of mouth and recommendations from parents with children in a program are an important part of any parent's research while considering day care.

There was only one fine in Putnam County last year, for \$100 assessed to Green Chimneys Children Services in Patterson. Green Chimneys' Nature's Nursery got the fine for not filing its staff training paperwork properly.

Green Chimneys was also cited last year for violating the state's fingerprinting law, which Executive Director Joseph Whalen said was due to the transfer of a longtime staff member from Green Chimneys' school to its day care.

"She's been working for me for 30 years and she may not have had anything current," said Whalen, who invited The Journal News to tour his facility.

Whalen said he supports the inspection process.

"I think the regulations are there for a good purpose. They keep us all in line, but people who come out have to have the same consistency of review. That takes good training," Whalen said.

Halas said that her council receives complaints from day care programs about inspectors interpreting state regulations differently, but she noted that the rules are subject to interpretation. Her advice to day care providers is to become experts on the rules.

"When a director and staff people are very well-informed, if a question comes up they are able to have a discussion with the (inspector) about the perceived violations," Halas said.

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