

# Blaine parents react to ‘shockingly wicked’ abuse case involving three infants at day care center

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Rep. Nolan West, R-Blaine, joined other parents in calling for accountability and stronger oversight of Minnesota day care centers.

Cody and Christina Pech say they worked hard to find a day care center that was safe. But they began seeing their 5-month-old son, Cassian, covered in bruises within two weeks of going to the Small World Learning Center’s Blaine location.

The Pech’s story mirrors that of two other families, who say they repeatedly met with similar signs of abuse and excuses from staffers.

“At this point, we just want to make sure that nothing like this ever happens to any family again,” said Cody Pech, with Cassian in his arms.

Two former staffers at the Blaine day care have been charged with felonies after being caught on video last week violently flipping and slamming three infants. Family members and parents of the abused babies gathered for a press conference Wednesday to call for legislative action and accountability for Small World.

According to the charges, Chloe Kaye Johnson, 24, of Andover, and Elizabeth Augusta Wiemerslage, 22, of Coon Rapids, repeatedly abused the children as shown on surveillance video. The women were jailed Thursday and released Friday after posting \$10,000 bond.

Rep. Nolan West, R-Blaine, whose daughter Sibyl was one of the infants in the case, said he plans to find bipartisan solutions to prevent similar abuse.

West said he hopes to require surveillance video to be used at all Minnesota day care centers and require longer retention time for the footage, such as a period of six months. Small World currently keeps its footage for seven days, he said.

If an abusive incident occurs, West said, he wants to extend the retention period to three years and provide access to the footage for the family within 24 hours. He also wants the maximum punishment increased for the abuser of a child under 4.

West's wife, Megan, said she trusted Sibyl's caretakers and never thought they'd be capable of the alleged crimes.

"Their actions are extremely evil, shockingly wicked and violent," she said. "I hope they get put away for a long time."

Susanne Dickinson, grandmother to one of the abused infants, said the family's "nightmare" began in May when her granddaughter began coming home with bruises and cuts. Of the five reports she said the family received prior to the July arrests, only two were signed by a supervising director.

Parents said Johnson and Wiemerslage suggested the injuries were caused by infant swings or accidents involving older children. Many parents were told they needed to cut their infant's nails shorter.

Video captured Johnson as she grabbed one infant "by her upper thighs, hip and groin area and violently [flipped the baby] back and forth from her stomach to her back," according to the charges.

In the video, the charges say, the baby's "arms are flailing outward, and her body is consistently rigid as her face contacts the floor mat repeatedly as she is being flipped and her head is unsupported."

Dickinson said she's angry with Small World. Her granddaughter can't handle tummy time or bottle feeding without crying, she said, something she believes is directly tied to the abuse the infant experienced.

"The day care must have known," she said. "If they had taken this seriously, maybe we wouldn't have a fractured leg."

Medical reports indicate that one infant had bruises in nine locations that are consistent with excessive gripping or squeezing. One of the other babies had a leg fracture that may have occurred a couple of weeks ago.

The day care center's license remains active, according to Sarah Berg, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Human Services. Berg said the agency has a maltreatment investigation underway involving Small World, but due to data privacy restrictions she declined to say whether it involves this case.

Blaine Police Capt. Mark Boerboom said other families using Small World have been advised to have their children evaluated and to contact police if they detect any unexplainable injuries.