

# Day-care workers charged with not reporting abuses



SEATTLE (AP) — For the first time in Washington state, day-care supervisors have been charged with failing to report suspected child abuse.

The case involves four employees at the Overlake KinderCare Learning Center, in suburban Redmond, who go on trial Jan. 18.

A child-care worker, Jodi Lynn Hall, is charged with fourth-degree assault and supervisors Susan Schmidt, Kimberly Gerbel and Patricia Barrett each with failure to report suspected child abuse. All four face a maximum penalty of a year in jail and a \$5,000 fine.

Hall, 26, is accused of yanking, slapping and shaking young children. In one instance, prosecutors said, she tossed a little boy on his head from the top railing of a crib.

Prosecutors said Redmond police uncovered a pattern of abuse against four children, aged four months to 14 months, at the center, which is one of more than 1,200 KinderCare operations nationwide.

Supervisors repeatedly were told of mistreatment but never tried to stop it and one worker, Dana Beck, was admonished in

writing for insubordination after she complained, prosecutors said.

"I felt KinderCare was more concerned about making money than they were about the employees and the children," Stacy O'Neill, who worked at the day care center until June 1992, was quoted as saying.

Ruth Kwake told police she visited the center several times a day to nurse her own baby and she saw Hall slap an eight-month-old girl fiercely in the mouth after the little girl bit the worker in the leg while teething.

Hall then yelled, "That's what you get. I told you not to bite!" Kwake said in a recorded interview. "There was abuse going on, on a daily basis at some degree with a child. It was not a hit-and-miss situation."

The case is the first prosecution brought under a law in the 1980s that added child-care workers to a list of professionals who must report abuse or neglect to police or Child Protective Services, state officials said.

Lawyers for Gerbel argued in court documents that there is no proof that Hall caused any injuries.

"Other than amorphous statements relating to rough handling and yelling, I cannot determine the 'abuse' which was

**'There was abuse going on, on a daily basis at some degree with a child.'**

— Ruth Kwake,  
mother of a child in the Overlake  
KinderCare center

allegedly reported," said Todd Maybrown, representing Gerbel.

Nor is there any specific evidence of wrongdoing to support the failure-to-report charges, lawyers for all three supervisors said.

"All allegations are based on hearsay and second-hand information," said Robert McSeveney, who represents Schmidt.

Hall was fired after an internal review in which the supervisors were cleared of wrongdoing, said Colleen Hughes-Kraft, regional manager of KinderCare, which operates 36 centers in the Puget Sound area.

The supervisors have been assigned tasks without child contact pending trial, she added.

Hughes-Kraft said the review found current training policies — six weeks of

instruction for new hires and continuing monthly classes in child care — were sufficient.

A company workshop scheduled before the case arose included a refresher course on identifying and reporting child abuse, she said.

"We have always prided ourselves in our training," she said. "We have to do the right thing for the child. That remains the focus."

Nationwide, KinderCare has been cited in relatively few neglect or abuse cases.

Civil and criminal charges have been brought against two teachers accused of fondling a total of six youngsters at a KinderCare center in West Columbia, S.C.

New closing procedures were adopted at a KinderCare center in New Haven, Ind., after a three-year-old girl was locked alone inside the center when the staff went home in February 1991.

According to a *Miami Herald* report in 1990, each prospective KinderCare employee must be screened by two supervisors, who are given a six-page questionnaire with instructions for interviewing, a list of 20 questions and a form to make telephone reference checks with at least three former employers.

## ET ALS

### MEETINGS

Student Senate will meet today at 5:30 p.m. in EMU Century Room E. For more information, call 346-0630.

Incidental Fee Committee will meet today at 5 p.m. in the EMU Board Room. For more information, call 346-3749.

Order of Omega will meet tonight at 6 in Room 248 PLC. For more information, call 342-8590.

Students for Equal Access will meet today at 2 p.m. in EMU Suite 1. For more information, call 346-0611.

Alpha Lambda Delta and Phi Eta Sigma will conduct a winter initiation and general meeting tonight at 6 in the EMU Oak Room.

### MISCELLANEOUS

Academic Advising and Student Services will present "Preparing for the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test)" today at 3:30 p.m. in Room 164 Oregon Hall. For more information, call 346-3211.

Deadline for submitting Et Als to the Emerald front desk, 300 EMU, is noon the day before publication. Et Als run the day of the event unless the event takes place before noon.

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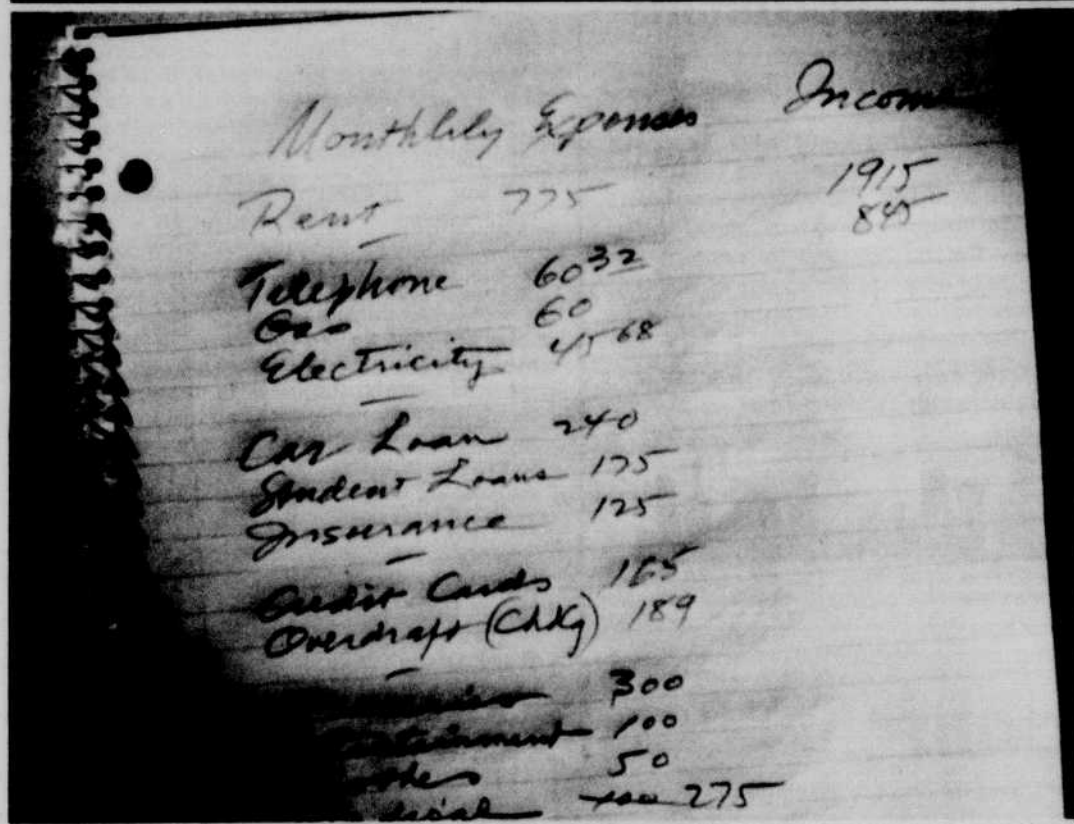
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