

# Judge wants more information before ruling on Kindertown

By Kathryn Reed

Maria Barrows-Crist was planning a victory party for Friday afternoon. The judge denied anyone a party. Instead, he asked both sides in the South Lake Tahoe day care battle to file more briefs.

June is the soonest a decision will be rendered, unless El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey works over Memorial Day weekend.



Maria Barrows-Crist with attorney Mike McLaughlin after court April 23.

The state Department of Social Services has been trying to put Barrows-Crist's Kindertown out of business since last summer.

Mike McLaughlin, who is representing Barrows-Crist, said after the 90-minute hearing on Friday that he doesn't believe the court will shutter Kindertown for one violation.

Although multiple allegations have brought against Barrows-Crist, the three that dominated the discussion April 23 were

whether any employee was under the influence of alcohol or drugs while supervising children; the nickel-size burn on a child from spilled soup; and a peanut product given to a child with a known allergy to the nut.

Everyone agrees the child was given the peanut product even though the necessary precautions and warnings were in place. McLaughlin does not believe that incident alone is reason enough to close the center.

Brenda Ray, deputy attorney general with the state Department of Justice, kept up her mantra that she's been preaching that if Kindertown stays open, there is the strong likelihood a child will be seriously injured or die.

Despite the 8-month-long court fight, Kindertown's enrollment is increasing. She has 93 children, whereas in February she had 83. However, in September she was at 120.

Tears filled Barrows-Crist's eyes as the judge said to file the briefs by May 21, with rebuttals to him by May 28.

"I thought there would be a celebration today," she said.