

Kindertown day care wins case against state

By Kathryn Reed

Kindertown is staying open.



The Kindertown bus will keep rolling.

It was Sept. 23, 2009, that Maria Barrows-Crist told the parents of her South Lake Tahoe day care the state would be shutting the facility down the next month.

It didn't happen then and it's not going to happen now. Judge Stephen Bailey ruled Aug. 26 the state Department of Social Services had no basis to close the center that has been operating for more than 30 years.

"This court holds this bias against the licensee constitutes an abuse of discretion and constitutes cause to set aside the decision," the 26-page ruling says.

Through tears on Thursday night, Barrows-Crist felt vindicated – but not 100 percent relieved.

"They almost forced me to bankruptcy," she said. "Look what they have done to my family. Since October 2007 they started harassing me. I really feel like I have been harassed. How about the people who don't fight for their rights."

Crist v. the state of California cost the plaintiff \$85,000 in attorney fees. Mike McLaughlin replaced her first attorney last fall and went the distance for Barrows-Crist. Another \$300,000 in income was lost in the last nine months, she said.

It's come down to needing to have a yard sale on Aug. 27-28 at 2241 Idaho St., South Tahoe to help raise the money needed to pay the bills.

Through it all, 35 families remained with her – never taking their children out of the center. She has 100 children now. The general childcare is full, and people are calling to get in.

If the state would pass a budget, cash for the state preschool would roll in.

The ruling backs what McLaughlin presented in court and discounted what the state's attorney had to say. The decision says there is no proof Barrows-Crist's daughter was using drugs at the work place or under the influence while there. It backs other decisions by the center that the state took issue with.

Barrows-Crist wants to celebrate, to throw a party, but the dollars aren't in her bank account to do so right now. For now, she sends thanks through *Lake Tahoe News* to the city, lawmakers, friends, families and people she doesn't know who supported her through the ordeal.