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City Seeks to Close 15 Day Care Centers in Budget Cut

By JULIE BOSMAN



Chester Higgins Jr./The New York Times

Josephine Rodriguez of the Court Street Day Care Center, one of those on a list to be closed.

More than a half-dozen gentrified neighborhoods in Brooklyn would lose subsidized day care centers for low-income families under proposed city budget cuts, Bloomberg administration officials said Wednesday.

A list of the 15 day care centers that are scheduled to close in July, 10 of them in Brooklyn, was released by the **Administration for Children's Services**, and the agency tried to head off protests by unions, elected officials and families that have vowed to fight the closings.

City officials countered that most of the centers to be closed are in neighborhoods that no longer need as many slots for children in low-income families.

Those neighborhoods include Cobble Hill, Boerum Hill, Prospect Heights and Clinton Hill, according to the list of day care centers provided by Children's Services; 324 other centers will stay open.

Other centers that would be closed are in Coney Island, Morningside Heights in Manhattan and Jamaica and the Rockaways in Queens. Melanie Hartzog, a deputy commissioner at Children's Services, said that gentrified communities like Clinton Hill had a heavy concentration of eligible children 20 years ago, "but that's not the case today, so there is a mismatch."

Many of the day care centers first opened two decades ago, when rents in the city were far lower. The city signed long-term leases on the centers' spaces, but the centers are run by nonprofit organizations that contract with the city. Some of those leases will expire soon, and city officials said it was too expensive to renew them.

All of the children who currently attend the day care centers will be offered spaces at nearby locations, Ms. Hartzog said. She said that some of the facilities were run-down and in need of expensive repairs, providing more reasons to discontinue their funds. Many of them were not operating at capacity.

Families eligible for subsidized day care pay a weekly fee of \$5 to \$153, based on income and family size.

The budget cut would save the city \$9 million next year and reduce the number of day care slots by 1,200, or nearly 5 percent of the total capacity.

Andrea Anthony, the executive director of the Day Care Council of New York, an umbrella group for day care centers, said she was planning an emergency meeting on Friday to mobilize sympathetic elected officials and families. "To say the least, we think it's a devastating cut," she said. "In the last four years, we've lost kindergarten classrooms, we've lost after-school programming and now we're going to lose child care centers."

George Raglan Jr., the executive director of District Council 1707, the union that represents more than 25,000 social services employees in New York, said that hundreds of day care center employees would lose their jobs.

"I believe that they're closing these centers because they've been wanting to cut subsidized child care for a long time," Mr. Raglan said. "They just want to shut them down. They don't care if they're doing well."

One center that is scheduled to close, the Court Street Day Care Center in Cobble Hill, was founded more than 30 years ago by the American-Italian Coalition of Organizations, a nonprofit group.

In the beginning, the center served many Italian, Hispanic and black families, said Jerry Chiappetta, the organization's executive director. Now it shares a block with a chocolatier and an upscale grocery store, and is used mainly by black and Hispanic families, many of whom live in nearby Red Hook.

Mr. Chiappetta said he was told that the center would be shut down because of its high maintenance cost, including rent and utilities.

"It's unfortunate, because this day care is used by working families, for the most part single-parent families and they're low income," he said, adding, "If this place is shut down, it would really be a shame."