

## **268 kids were left alone at Bethlehem's casino over 4 years. A new plan seeks to change that.**

Written by Administrator  
Wednesday, 18 May 2022 15:17 -

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On its face it's a shocking figure: 147 incidents over four years where 268 children were left unattended at Bethlehem's casino.

The incidents from 2018 to 2021 ranged from a mere minute to nine hours, and are part of an increasingly concerning trend at the casino, the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board said Wednesday.

Now, owners Wind Creek Hospitality have developed a mitigation plan to not only deter parents or guardians from leaving kids alone, but detecting incidents as well.

The PGCB did not detail each incident, but said the kids' ages ranged from 2 months to 17 years old, and they were found in various locations, from parked cars and secure hotel rooms to the food court or the outlet mall, the PGCB said.

The casino was owned by the Sands before it was sold in 2019 to Wind Creek.

More recently, from 2021 to April 2022, there were 43 times children were found alone on the casino property. Of those:

- 32 were located at the food court
- Five in the casino's parking areas
- Two in the hotel
- Three in the attached outlet mall
- One in the casino's main entrance

Wind Creek's plan, presented Wednesday, includes more signage in and around the casino, increased training for staff, and mobile patrols in parking areas and foot patrols inside by outside security.

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“For the past several months, probably better part of a year, we have analyzed a lot of incident reports, poured through a lot of data, to really focus on what we believe are the most problematic areas, the things we could tackle to reduce this problem as much as possible,” Michael Magazzu, Wind Creek’s executive director of compliance and risk assessment, said.

Most of the recent incidents involved the food court, and Magazzu said new signs on every table there have cut down on children being left alone.

But one PGCB member took issue with the signs used for people leaving the parking garage, saying that minors must be accompanied by an adult.

The sign should say, “‘Parents, don’t leave your kids in the car!’ I don’t know why you’re dancing around the issue,” Sean Logan said. “You’re here because people are leaving kids in cars unattended. And they’re leaving kids in their hotel rooms unattended.”

Glenn Granitz, the former Allentown police chief who is now head of security at Wind Creek, told the board of improvements made to security patrols in the outlet mall and food court area, including a security officer stationed in the food court.

The casino has also increased its use of Bethlehem police officers patrolling parking lots, both on foot and in cars.

Granitz spoke about the large size of the campus and how ArtsQuest hosts a number of large events that attract kids and families to the neighboring SteelStacks. Recently, when it rained during prom season, the casino becomes a place for pictures, he said.

“Clearly a lot of people of all ages coming and going,” he said.

This is the second mitigation plan for unattended children at casinos in Pennsylvania, the PCGB said.

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The first was developed by Valley Forge Casino Resort in Montgomery County in November 2021. Valley Forge's plan included a new [infrared camera system](#) to detect children and adults in vehicles with tinted windows.

Wind Creek does not use infrared cameras, but Granitz said it's something being considered.

"Since the Board publicly addressed this serious situation, we have seen the casinos step up their efforts to detect children left unattended on their property while adults responsible for their care gamble," said Gaming Control Board Executive Director Kevin O'Toole. "All casinos are taking this matter seriously and we expect more specific plans, such as those implemented at Valley Forge and Wind Creek casinos, to come before us in the near future."

The board did not say how many of the 147 incidents resulted in an arrest and/or charges.

Lehighvalleylive.com has reported on some of the incidents. In 2019, a New Jersey woman was accused of leaving three kids under the age of 10 alone in a car for two hours in 2019. The next year, an 8-year-old boy and his 2-year-old sister were found wandering the fifth floor of the parking garage in January.

The figures released Wednesday were news to the Northampton County District Attorney's Office, which was not contacted by Wind Creek or the board about the issue.

The casino sits in Northampton County, and arrests in incidents involving children would be referred by law enforcement to the district attorney's child abuse and sexual assault unit, headed by Chief Deputy District Attorney [Tatum Wilson](#).

"We would welcome the the opportunity" to talk to the casino or the PGCB, Wilson said.

Wilson said the number of cases prosecuted by the unit during the four-year timeframe doesn't match the figures provided by the PGCB.

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Every incident would not result in a parent or guardian being arrested and/or charged. Charging a parent would depend on a number of factors, including the age of the child, how long they were left alone, where they were found, and if it involved a vehicle, Wilson said

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