

Columbia to evict long-standing Red Balloon preschool in West Harlem

By Esther Sun

September 20, 2022

Photo by Annie Son

The entrance to Red Balloon Learning Center is lined with colorful shapes and patterns painted on its cinder block walls, welcoming guests to one of nine Columbia-affiliated daycare centers for the children of faculty, staff, and students.

In 1972, Columbia offered the location to Red Balloon for free to a group of parents who ultimately became Red Balloon’s founders through the Columbia Day Care Project. This summer, however, Columbia informed the nonprofit center’s parent board that Red Balloon must leave its location in a Columbia residential building by August 2023.

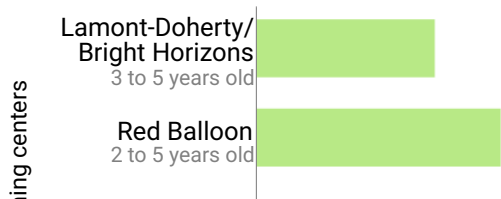
“They won’t really give us a reason,” Annapurna Potluri Schreiber, president of the parent board, said. “We can’t figure out why, after 50 years, they would take away the space that was built for the preschool.”

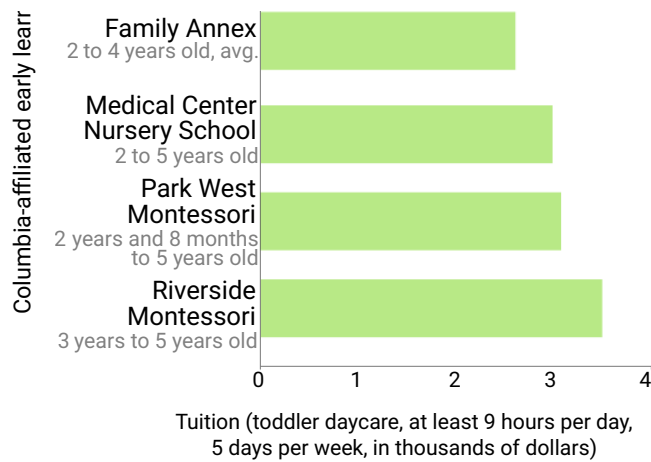
Denise Fairman, executive director of Red Balloon, called Columbia’s decision not to renew Red Balloon’s lease “devastating.”

“This school just has a feeling to it that I haven’t experienced before, whether in the private, public, or even in charter schools,” Fairman, who has worked in education for nearly 30 years, said. “The parents, the children, [and] the teachers are really a family.”

Monthly tuitions of Columbia-affiliated daycares

Five of the centers that provide 10-hour childcare per day charge more than \$2,500 per month.





Graphic by Esther Sun

Of the six Columbia-affiliated centers that offer more than nine hours of daycare for five days a week, Red Balloon charges the second-lowest monthly tuition rate for toddlers, according to center websites. Over half of its enrolled children receive need-based financial aid; all but one child are Columbia-affiliated. Several children, for whom Fairman is currently applying for Administration for Children’s Services vouchers, are New York City Housing Authority residents. The vouchers help eligible low-income families pay for childcare.

Alice Huang enrolled her then- two-year-old twins at Red Balloon in fall 2020. As she prepared to begin her new role as an associate professor of bioengineering at the Columbia University Irving Medical Center, Huang felt drawn to Red Balloon by “the sense of community that was there—the parent engagement,” as well as the relatively affordable tuition.

“The affordability is a really key component,” Huang said. “I’m faculty, but I had twins, and tuition—daycare in general—was very expensive in New York City. I can’t imagine as a postdoc or a graduate student, if you have children, how you could possibly still juggle this.”

Without its partnership with Columbia, however, Fairman said it would be difficult for Red Balloon to move to a different location while continuing to serve low-income families. Paying rent at a new location, which would inevitably be higher than Columbia's \$1one-dollar-a-month rate, would leave them unable to accommodate the children in the community whose parents are unable to afford private daycare.

When considering Red Balloon's eviction, parents worry that the Columbia community will lose a daycare option that has been regarded as notable for its racial and socioeconomic diversity. Though a majority of Red Balloon families are Columbia affiliates, 36 percent are non-Columbia affiliated Harlem and Morningside Heights residents. 77 percent of the staff and 59 percent of the children at Red Balloon identify as Black, Latinx, or Asian.

For Potluri Schreiber, the cultural competence of Red Balloon's staff makes it an especially welcoming learning environment for her son. On Diwali, for example, a non-Hindu teacher invited Potluri Schreiber to bring in a project for the children to celebrate the holiday.

"She made little lanterns with them because she wanted my son to make a piece of his home life that was important and beautiful to be shared with the rest of his classroom," Potluri Schreiber said. "And that's the kind of place this school is."

Fairman also places an emphasis on accommodating children with disabilities, which parents say would be difficult to find at other Columbia daycares.

Emily Bloom, former associate director of the Society of Fellows and Heyman Center for the Humanities, reached out to the Columbia Office of Work-Life when her daughter was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes in 2019.

“They said that they did not know of any daycares that would be willing to work with us,” Bloom said. “So that was a very clear signal to me and one of the reasons I left my job—that we weren’t going to be able to find accommodations.”

Forced to quit her position at Columbia, Bloom took her daughter back to her hometown for a year before she reached out to Red Balloon about the possibility of her daughter attending part-time so that she could find work in the area again. Bloom said Red Balloon was receptive to her situation and willing to work with her to monitor her daughter’s diabetes.

“That was a really important key for me getting back to work,” Bloom said. “It meant a lot, a lot, a lot to our family that they were able to do that for us.”

Fairman said Columbia had not provided any reason as to why the decision to end Red Balloon’s lease was made, nor did the University specify the exact cause of the closure in a statement to Spectator.

“This was a decision based on our expectations for Columbia affiliated early learning centers and came after years of working with the center,” a University spokesperson wrote in the statement. “We will be offering information resources to all families engaging in a search for a new

program, regardless of their affiliation with Columbia.”

Columbia-affiliated learning centers are run independently but in various kinds of partnerships with the University, with the expectations of maintaining consistent leadership and adhering to other standards set by the University.

According to Columbia, the decision to end Red Balloon’s lease in August 2023 instead of 2022 was in order to provide time for families to find a different childcare center for the next school year.

But to many Red Balloon parents and staff, Columbia’s decision is reflective of the larger institutional direction of expansion into West Harlem. The linchpin of its push, the Manhattanville campus, opened in January after 13 years of construction.

“Columbia keeps expanding ... into these communities of color who have been there for generations,” Potluri Schreiber said. “People come to Columbia because they want a thriving, vital neighborhood—not just one that feels like [an] anodyne campus where the local culture has been eradicated. ... As a mom who wants my children to prize the history of this neighborhood, I feel like we have a responsibility as a good neighbor to make sure that this place retains its valuable institutions.”

Above all, parents attested to the sense of community at Red Balloon, which they felt would be one of the greatest losses along with the space.

“To have real community that sticks with you is really, really important,” Potluri Schreiber said. “That’s why we’re fighting so hard

for it.”

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‘In Crisis’: The costs of the Red Balloon eviction for young parents at Columbia

By Esther Sun

Edited by Irie Sentner and Amira McKee

April 20, 2023

Isabel Iino / Staff Photographer

When Hannah Throssell, SSW '24, prepared to pack her suitcases in summer 2022 to start her master's program at the School of Social Work, she said she encountered the most stress not from her upcoming classes or leaving behind her home in Arizona, but over finding childcare for her toddler son.

When Throssell reached out to Columbia's Office of Work/Life to request help with finding child care, the office sent her a one-page [spreadsheet](#) of Columbia's affiliated child care centers, she said. Even on a first scan, Throssell was stunned by the tuition costs—many of which surpass \$30,000 per year for full-time care.

Without the financial means to pay the high costs or any family members able to move with her to New York City to help care for her son, Throssell found herself at a loss. She ended up calling all of the centers on the list.

The Red Balloon Learning Center was one of them.

“Poor Denise—she just got this frantic phone call, me crying like, ‘I need child care. I don't know what to do. We're supposed to leave in two weeks, I'm literally selling everything here in Arizona just so I can make the move to New York for school,’” Throssell said.



Hannah Throssell, SSW '24, a current parent at the Red Balloon Learning Center.
Photography by Frances Cohen / Staff Photographer

Denise Fairman, the executive director of Red Balloon, which Throssell's son currently attends, told her that she would talk to the school's parent board and see what it could do. Ultimately, Throssell said Red Balloon was able to offer her a tuition rate of \$1,500 per month, marked down from its standard \$2,500 per month.

For Throssell and many young parents like her, the affordability of Red Balloon tuition and its ability to meet the individual needs of low-income families has been essential in their abilities to study and work at Columbia. Formed initially as a parent cooperative in the 1970s in response to University child care needs, Red Balloon has operated

without having to pay rent in a University-owned building for 50 years. In summer 2022, however, Columbia notified the school that it would have to leave the space by August 2023.

[Read more: [Columbia to evict long-standing Red Balloon preschool in West Harlem](#)]

Spectator has spent the past year covering Red Balloon's fight against eviction, with new developments ranging from [campus rallies](#) to [public support](#) from elected officials on the New York City Council and in the New York State Assembly.

This three-part series examines some of the deeper questions that Red Balloon parents and Columbia community members have raised about child care at Columbia.

Continue reading [Part I](#), where Red Balloon parents discuss their experiences with other Columbia-affiliated child care centers and West Harlem-based providers.

Produced with [Spectate](#) by the [Spectator Graphics](#) team.

NEWS

Body of 19-year-old swimmer found in Delaware River after 3-day search

Jose Madera Martinez, of New Jersey, was last seen trying to swim to bridge abutments in the middle of the river.



July 18, 2023, 1:11 PM EDT / Source: TODAY

By Esther Sun

The body of a 19-year-old New Jersey man who went missing while swimming last week was found in the Delaware River on Sunday morning after a three-day hunt, [the National Park Service](#) said.

Jose Madera Martinez, from Paterson, was found in approximately 12 feet of water near near Kittatinny Point about a mile downstream from where he was last seen struggling against the current on July 13, the park service said.

He had been attempting to swim from the river's New Jersey shoreline at Karamac, a trail near the state line with Pennsylvania, to some bridge abutments in the middle of the river.

"The current in this section of the river is particularly swift," the park service said in a [statement on July 14](#), two days before Martinez's body was found.

Martinez was swimming with three other people at the time, officials said. Two of them were rescued by volunteer members from Portland Hook and Ladder Company, and one of them was able to swim to shore, officials said.

"Our deepest sympathies go out to the family and friends of this young man following this tragic incident," park ranger and rescue team leader Dustin Gunderson said in a statement Sunday.

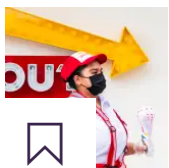
TODAY.com has contacted the National Park Service for additional comment.

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Jose Class, a friend of Martinez, [told News12 New Jersey](#) that he had gathered a group of friends to help look for Martinez in the three days that he was missing.

“He loved to enjoy himself because he always thought you’ve got to live it up because you don’t know when something is going to happen,” Class said.

According to the NPS, the Delaware River is currently past the 8-foot mark in some places, 2 or 3 feet higher than average, indicating danger for swimmers.

"The Delaware River may look calm in many areas but under the surface there are strong currents, steep drop-offs, sudden changes in depth, and underwater obstacles and hazards," the press release read. "Wearing a properly fitted and fastened life jacket is the number one thing that one can do to stay safe around the river."

Esther Sun

Esther Sun is an intern for TODAY.com. She loves café-hopping and watching cooking TikToks she knows she will never try.

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NEWS

Influencers gave glowing reviews of Shein's fast fashion factories. Backlash ensued

Experts say the sponsored trip was a calculated move to counteract the brand's reputation as "exploitative and careless." But did it work?



Signage of fast fashion e-commerce company SHEIN at a garment factory in Guangzhou, in China's southern Guangdong province. **Jade Gao / AFP via Getty Images**

June 27, 2023, 9:42 AM EDT / Source: TODAY

By Esther Sun

With over 29 million Instagram followers and the largest fast fashion market share in the U.S., Shein has no shortage of devotees.

But the retail giant, known for its low prices, has also come under fire over allegations of environmental harm or abusive labor practices. This June, the corporation has opened its doors in what appears to be a bid for a cleaner public image — and incited controversy in the process.

In a rare move among fashion retailers, Shein invited social media influencers last week for a tour of a model factory in Guangzhou, China, called the “Innovation Factory.” Since then, the trip has put heat on the influencers for promoting a brand well-known for backlash over ethical issues.

“With this PR stunt, Shein is trying to position itself and fight against the reputation that it has as a fast fashion behemoth that is exploitative and careless in how it thinks about the ethics along its supply chain,” Shivika Sinha, founder of the sustainable styling service Veneka and former fashion marketing consultant, tells TODAY.com.

What are the allegations against Shein?

Multiple news investigations and documentaries have investigated conditions at other Guangzhou factories used by Shein (the influencers visited one out of thousands). A Swiss advocacy group, Public Eye, found that employees worked 75-hour work weeks. A Channel4 documentary found that they were paid for less than \$20 per week.

The company was also reported to be sourcing cotton from Xinjiang, per a Bloomberg-funded laboratory test, where the Chinese government has been accused of holding hundreds of thousands of ethnic minorities in internment camps and forcing them to pick cotton or work in textile factories.

The brand has also faced criticism over environmental and health concerns. In 2021, CBC Marketplace reported that Shein was selling toddlers’ jackets containing almost 20 times the amount of lead that Health Canada permits for children.

Perhaps the most prominent criticism, however, has focused on Shein's high-consumption business model, propelled by its low clothing prices. The company produces tens of thousands of garments per day and reportedly releases over 6.3 million

tons of carbon per year, roughly equivalent to 180 coal power plants, per Synthetics Anonymous 2.0, a [report](#) published on fashion sustainability.

The company has appeared to take some of consumers' concerns regarding sustainability into account for its marketing efforts. In April 2022, the brand launched evoluSHEIN, a line of clothing items made partially with recycled polyester.

“Consumers these days are no longer looking just at price,” Shein executive vice president Donald Tang said at the World Retail Congress in Barcelona this past April. “In the next phase of growth we need to think everything we do with ESG in mind.”

ESG stands for “environmental, social, and governance” and generally refers to the social responsibility of corporate practices.

Who were the influencers and what did they see on the trip?

Shein is known to use influencers at the center of its marketing strategy, which caters largely to Gen Z consumers.

In 2018, Shein's first year expanding marketing efforts to India, the company collaborated with around 2,000 local influencers, per an interview with Shein's [then-marketing officer for India](#), and was reaching out to more influencers daily. Shein was banned by India in 2019, then relaunched in 2023.

TikTok is an especially important platform for the brand in this regard, with videos of Shein [clothing hauls](#) generating billions of views.

“They really understand how to work with influencers, how to parlay with these platforms really well in a way that Zara and H&M just weren't able to do,” Sinha says. “And so it makes sense that they reached out to influencers to do this.”

The influencers on the factory trip included Dani Carbonari (known as Dani DMC), Destene Sudduth, Aujené, Fernanda Campuzano, Kenya Freeman, and Marina Saavedra. TODAY.com has reached out for comment. Some TikToks were taken down.





Workers at the Innovation Factory pictured in an Instagram post by Dani Carbonari. @danidmc via Instagram

The influencers spoke to factory workers, according to their videos, and reported their findings.

"When I asked them questions like, 'What does your work week look like?' Most of them work 8 to 6 and their commute is 10 to 15 minutes, just like normal," Sudduth said in one of her videos posted on Instagram. "I expected this facility to be filled with people salving away. I was pleasantly surprised that most things were robotic. Everybody was just working like normal. They weren't even sweating."

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Sudduth's caption pointed to the intent of the trip, which seemed to be letting influencers see things for themselves: "Thoroughly enjoying this experience and seeing things with my own eyes."

The videos by Sudduth and the other influencers featured clips of clothing items being transported on automated rail systems and workers sitting at clean desks under bright white lights.

Outside of the "Innovation Factory," the influencers' trip included brand-sponsored luxury hotel rooms, excursions in Guangzhou, and a ten-course dinner.

Influencer Fernanda Campuzano, who was on the trip and has a fashion line with Shein, described the professional opportunities the trip posed in a statement to TODAY.

"This program has given me the opportunity to manufacture and sell my designs to customers worldwide while promoting my own brand which is something no other company has ever offered me before," she wrote. "This trip to Shein's innovation center was an opportunity to see for myself how my designs come to life in real time as well as to see more of the behind the scenes of how Shein operates."





A corner of the Innovation Factory from Destene Sudduth's TikTok account. @itsdestene_ via TikTok

Alden Wicker, a freelance investigative journalist with bylines in the New York Times, Wired, and Vogue, tells TODAY.com that the influencer trip was unconventional in that most fashion brands do not allow visitors in the factories that they contract with. She said that she even once tried to arrange a visit to a Los Angeles factory contracted by Reformation, a brand that markets itself as sustainable fashion, and was blocked.

“I think somebody who was more astute or who was actually a seasoned investigative journalist — they would have been able to see through a lot of this,” Wicker says, responding to Carbonari calling herself an “investigative journalist” in a video. “They would have noticed the things that they weren’t allowed to see or the questions they weren’t allowed to ask ... She was able to be manipulated very easily into thinking that this was a full view into their supply chain.”

In a statement to TODAY, Shein said the trip was part of the company’s “commitment to transparency.”

“This trip reflects one way in which we are listening to feedback, providing an opportunity to show a group of influencers how SHEIN works through a visit to our innovation center and enabling them to share their own insights with their followers,” a Shein spokesperson wrote. “Their social media videos and commentary are authentic, and we respect and stand by each influencer’s perspective and voice on their experience. We look forward to continuing to provide more transparency around our on-demand business model and operations.”

What has been the response to the trip?

The factory trip has sparked backlash across social media platforms and in the influencers' own comment sections.

Kara Fabella, an Instagram influencer focused on sustainable fashion, tells TODAY.com that the slow fashion community is “appalled at the hypocrisy of it all.”

“One of the big things that I’ve had discussions about with my peers is the fact that they really targeted a lot of plus size as well as POC influencers,” Fabella says. “And there’s such an irony to that because not only are they exploiting voices within the fashion influencer space of typically quote-unquote ‘marginalized’ groups, but it’s also (that) Shein is one of the worst abusers of human rights issues within the garment worker factory space.”

Although she sees the influencer trip as a PR stunt, Sinha says it was “heartening” that it seemed to signal to her how the pressure on Shein from consumers regarding sustainability and ethics was making enough of a difference for the company to pay attention.

“It means that something is happening internally in their corporate conversations,” Sinha says. “Enough has happened outside of them for them to sit up and take notice of this issue. I think it’s up to consumers and advocates to keep pushing and to keep holding them accountable and to not be disheartened whatsoever.”

Esther Sun

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PRESS FREEDOM

Heavy-Handed Police Response to Media in LA Comes After New Law

July 08, 2022 8:18 PM

Esther Sun

LOS ANGELES — Focused on filming a police car, Vishal Singh was shocked to look up from his camera and find himself “staring down the barrel” of a weapon.

“[I] was just kind of taken aghast and I just asked, ‘Are you serious?’ ” Singh told VOA.

The freelance journalist’s press badge was on display but the police officer, carrying equipment that fires less-lethal rounds such as beanbags or rubber bullets, was insistent, telling Singh he had to leave.

“Not even ‘get out of the way,’ just ‘you need to go home,’ ” Singh said.

The incident was one of several interactions between police and media during June 24 protests in Los Angeles and other U.S. cities in response to the Supreme Court’s decision striking down the Roe v. Wade ruling on abortion access.

At least eight journalists were assaulted, detained or had equipment damaged covering the protests in Los Angeles that day, according to the U.S. Press Freedom Tracker, a coalition of news websites and media rights groups that document violations against media.

The incidents came despite California in 2021 passing SB-98 — a bill designed to prevent police from obstructing journalists, including in blocked-off areas.

The Los Angeles Police Department did not respond to VOA's emails requesting comment.

But city police Chief Michel Moore told the *Los Angeles Times* his department would investigate the media complaints and take action where necessary.

“If the officer is found to have ignored the law, ignored the policy, then disciplinary action will follow,” Moore said.

However, Tom Saggau, whose media communications firm represents the L.A. Police Protective League, told VOA it can be difficult for police at protests to determine who is a journalist, and said that officers at protests are increasingly met with violence.

Media relations

Tensions between media and Los Angeles police are not new.

In 2020 and 2021, the L.A. Press Club documented 40 incidents of apparent misconduct toward journalists, including assaults, injuries, equipment damage or seizure, and arrests. At least 26 incidents involved journalists of color.

Cases often involved freelancers or journalists working at less established or smaller media outlets.

So, the Press Club, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) and other organizations lobbied for rights and protections to be enshrined in law.

When the SB-98 bill was debated, several California police associations objected on the grounds of security, the increased physical danger officers are working under and concerns over provisions that allow media to access restricted areas.

One of those to oppose the bill is the California Police Chiefs Association. Chris Catren, the association president, told VOA via email, "The new law has the potential to prevent safety professionals from doing our job safely to protect the public during potentially dangerous situations."

Catren said the association had serious concerns about the legislation, including that "it allows unidentified media to deliberately interfere with emergency personnel — police, fire and medics — during major protests."

Despite the objections, the law passed. A coalition of media groups and legal experts then worked with police on how the legislation should be implemented.

But journalists say the incidents last month suggest the law is not being applied correctly.

"What we were seeing on [that] evening from law enforcement was against what is the law on the books," said Ashanti Blaize-Hopkins.

The Emmy-award winning journalist and president of the SPJ Greater Los Angeles chapter took part in efforts to pass the law and foster better press-police relations.

Media obstructed

Singh and other journalists whom VOA interviewed said police pushed or obstructed them, pointed less lethal weapons in their direction and did not appear to know or be willing to recognize the media's rights.

"I was filming officers pointing their less lethal weapons at protesters at a very close range and firing," Singh said. "An officer grabbed me [by] the shoulder and just threw me. I weigh like 90 pounds. ... If it weren't for protesters catching me, I would have fallen to the ground."

At another point, several journalists found themselves detained in a kettle, a term for when a crowd is contained on a street by lines of police officers blocking exits.

When Singh and the others asked police if an unlawful assembly had been declared, and where the dispersal route was, officers did not answer, he said.

“The police were being incredibly hyperaggressive,” said Jake Green, an independent photojournalist who was covering the protest for agencies including Sipa USA. “They were breaking the line several times in order to sort of get their jabs in.”

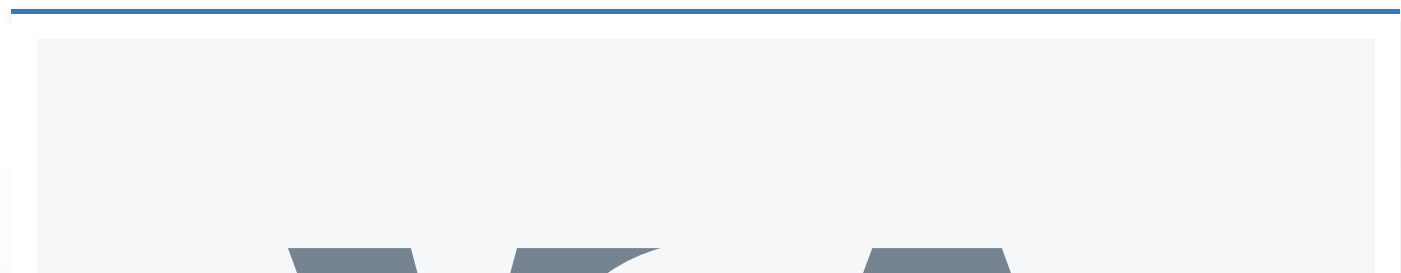
Green says he usually maintains a distance of around 10 feet (about 3 meters) from the police line when covering protests, but as he looked away to frame a shot, he felt officers shove him.

Jonathan Peltz, a regular contributor at the nonprofit news outlet Knock LA, said he had less lethal weapons aimed at him as he slowly backed away from police with his hands raised.

“I understand that they're in a situation where they're trying to control crowd movements, but in my mind, if I'm flashing a pass, I believe they should understand that I'm legally entitled to newsgathering,” Peltz said.

The journalist is currently suing the Los Angeles Police Department over a 2021 arrest for failure to disperse while covering a protest over the dismantling of a homeless encampment. Peltz was one of about a dozen journalists detained on that occasion.

Police across the U.S. have previously emphasized the difficulty of dealing with media at protests, saying it is hard to check credentials, and that sometimes journalists are caught in arrests when officers clear an area or impose a curfew.





SEE ALSO:

[Police Response to Press at Black Lives Matter Protests Tests First Amendment](#)

Saggau, whose company represents the L.A. Police Protective League, also acknowledged the difficulty for officers in determining who is a journalist and who is “there to hurt others.”

“The officers’ frustration isn’t for folks that are legally, lawfully and peacefully exercising their First Amendment rights,” Saggau told VOA. “The frustration is with those that take advantage of every situation under the sun to target police officers.”

Another problem, according to Adam Rose, chair of the press rights committee at the LA Press Club, is that current training may not be sufficient.

“Over and over we've seen, within the department, they have requested more training for their officers, and they have been mandated to have more training, whether it's [by] rulings or settlements,” Rose said. “And inevitably, within a couple of years, they cut that training.”

The Los Angeles police did not respond to VOA’s emails requesting comment on training.

Despite SB-98's limited effect, Kirstin McCudden, managing editor of U.S. Press Freedom Tracker, believes the law was a significant step.

"I think L.A. has done a really important and large job of saying, 'Looking at what's happening here, how can we work to correct [it]?' " McCudden said.

By enacting legislation, she said, it is easier to review incidents like the June protests and say, "Well, here's where that new legislation really protected journalists, and here's where we have places to still improve."

Blaize-Hopkins of the SPJ/LA said it's hard to tell why the law has not yet improved interactions. The press unions plan to meet with the LAPD in the coming weeks.

"If it's an issue of training, if it's an issue of making sure that there's broad knowledge among the rank and file and also the officers that are on the ground, then our coalition is more than happy to help," Blaize-Hopkins said.



CITY NEWS | HOUSING AND LAND USE

State tentatively plans to house up to 200 migrants at Riverbank State Park



By [Grace Li](#) / Staff Photographer

BY ESTHER SUN • MAY 13, 2023 AT 2:35 PM

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The New York state Office of Emergency Management may shelter up to 200 migrants in facilities at Riverbank State Park starting this summer, according to a letter to Gov. Kathy Hochul and Jackie Bray, the commissioner of the New

York state division of homeland security and emergency services, from Community Board 9 Chair Barry Weinberg in opposition to the tentative plan.

Weinberg, who accompanied representatives from the state and city emergency management offices on an inspection of the facilities on Friday, said the state was looking to house migrants in the park's gymnasium and theater. He said that he, along with New York State Assembly member Al Taylor and New York State Sen. Cordell Cleare, who each represent large swaths of Harlem and were also present at the inspection, expressed to the OEM representatives their concerns with the use of the park facilities to house migrants.

“We made it very clear that given that the bathrooms and locker rooms are under renovation and congregate settings is not an appropriate solution for this crisis, setting up essentially field shelters in the gymnasium and theater are not acceptable solutions to this issue,” Weinberg said.

In response to a request for comment, a spokesperson from Hochul's office emphasized that Hochul has urged President Biden to provide federal aid to address the migrant crisis in New York City. The spokesperson did not provide comment on the use of Riverbank State Park to temporarily house migrants.

Weinberg's letter further described concerns with the state's plan for Riverbank State Park in light of its role as one of few public outdoor spaces in Harlem for recreational, athletic, and artistic activities.

“It is also unacceptable to take the gymnasium and theater offline during the busy summer season when it is one of the few outlets that our young people have for constructive activities while school is out,” Weinberg said.

According to Weinberg, State Sen. Robert Jackson, State Assembly member Inez E. Dickens, and City Council member Shaun Abreu are “all in agreement that this is not acceptable.”

The inspection of Riverbank State Park comes months after Hochul announced a \$26 million renovation plan for the park's track and field, arts center, and locker rooms, citing the park's importance as "a center for sports, recreation and environmental education."

"The Harlem community deserve access to green space, top notch sports facilities, and recreational opportunities," Hochul said in a statement in January regarding the renovation plan.

The park inspection also comes amid [criticism](#) of Hochul for what some New York state and City leaders have described as insufficient action from the state in coordinating with the city and other counties throughout New York state in addressing the migrant crisis. Hochul issued an emergency executive order on Tuesday, allowing the state to use over \$1 billion of its budget to support the city as officials anticipate an influx of migrants after the expiration of Title 42.

Weinberg said that while the state is also inspecting other parks like Roberto Clemente State Park in the Bronx for the same purpose, he feels that there are other state properties that may provide alternate solutions to housing migrants.

"I would, however, observe that State also essentially controls a large number of dormitories in SUNY, and those would be more appropriate place to keep people housed and offer them, you know, adequate showers and bathrooms and other facilities," Weinberg said. "If I were to be constructive in suggesting solutions, I would say, 'Have you considered the SUNY dormitories for the summer, assuming that they are not being used?'"

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