

Airline in Hot Water for Refusing to Let Disabled Girl Fly

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A plane in the fleet of Vladivostok Air, which has come under fire for allegedly refusing to allow a disabled girl to board one of its planes.

The Maritime Transportation Prosecutor's office is investigating a case in which Vladivostok Air refused to allow a disabled teen to board a plane over confusion about whether her condition permitted her to fly, news reports said Thursday.

Marina Barlukova, 18, was trying to return home to Ulan-Ude from Moscow, where she had undergone a leg amputation and chemotherapy. She had purchased three tickets so she would be able to lie down for the six-hour flight.

But despite having letters from doctors clearing her to fly, the airline informed her the day before the journey that they would not let her board without assurances that nothing would happen to her during the flight. They also asked her for an additional 200 euros (\$270), her family said.

"Vladivostok Air asked for unusual papers — a guarantee from a doctor that she will be in full health at the moment of takeoff. It's absurd," Ivan Barlukov, Marina's father, told Vesti.ru. "No one can issue that sort of document, even to a healthy person."

Kristina Ilinskaya, a senior aide to the prosecutor, said they are looking into the case but that it is currently unclear who was responsible for the scandal, since it was a code-share flight between Vladivostok Air and Aeroflot.

"At the moment, the prosecutor is clarifying the reasons for the refusal to transport a passenger with poor mobility and also the reasons why they fined her," she said, RBK reported.

Vladivostok Air is also undertaking an internal investigation, but a source told Vesti.ru that they were looking out for her safety and that of her fellow passengers.

"If the company is not sure whether a passenger will make it through the flight without causing harm to themselves and others around them, then we try not to take such responsibility on ourselves," the source said.

An e-mail request on Thursday for comment from the airline went unanswered.

Yekaterina Chisyakova, director of Gift of Life, the charity that helped pay for the flight and her treatment, told The Moscow Times that she believed a Vladivostok Air representative had apologized and that the fund would use the airline again.

"We don't have a choice because the airport uses this company. All people learn from their mistakes, and they will learn," she said. "We'll see what they say next time."

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