

Child Fatality Summary

Child's Name: Elijah Morales-Gozo

County: Pasco

Date of Birth: 1/26/2019

Date of Death: 10/29/2022

Report Number: 2022-332456

Family Composition Chart

Name	Age at Time of the Incident	Relationship with Deceased Child
Elijah Morales-Gozo	3 years	Deceased
Veronica Gozo	34 years	Mother
Zachary Johnson	33 years	Mother's Paramour

Circumstances Surrounding Death

On October 30, 2022, an investigation was received regarding the death of this 3-year-old toddler after he sustained an accidental gunshot wound the previous day. The toddler resided with his mother and the maternal grandparents; however, the incident occurred while the mother, the toddler, and her paramour were spending the weekend at a hotel.

The paramour picked up the mother and toddler from their home on the afternoon of October 29th, and there were plans for the three of them to spend the weekend together. That afternoon, they ate at a local fast-food restaurant, then they checked into a hotel around 9:00 p.m. According to the paramour, he placed his firearm atop a high dresser in the bedroom, then he used the bathroom while the mother unpacked. The mother reportedly had her back to the toddler, who was playing with his toys and moments later a gunshot was heard. Both adults quickly realized that the toddler had accidentally shot himself, prompting the mother to immediately carry him outside, attempt to initiate compressions, and seek help. Bystanders called 911 and first responders arrived at the hotel a short time later to provide medical attention. The toddler sustained a single gunshot wound to the face, and he was subsequently transported to Advent Health North Pinellas, where he was later pronounced deceased.

The toddler was described as a healthy active child. Per the mother, she and the paramour met on a social media platform approximately two weeks prior to the death incident. Of note, in 2009 the paramour was arrested in Illinois on charges related to aggravated battery of a child; he served approximately 13 years in prison and was released in July 2022. The mother was reportedly unaware of the paramour's arrest history.

Presumptive drug screens were conducted on both adults, and they tested negative for any substances. There were no alcohol, drugs, or drug paraphernalia found in the hotel room and neither of the adults was noted to appear impaired at the onset of the investigation.

An autopsy was conducted by Dr. A. Koopmeiners the District 6 (Pinellas and Pasco Counties) Medical Examiner's Office. The cause of death was determined as gunshot wound of head and the manner as an accident.

The Pasco County Sheriff's Office conducted the criminal investigation concerning the toddler's death. According to information provided to law enforcement, the paramour advised that he unintentionally brought the firearm with him to the hotel. However, once he realized the firearm was in his bag, he put it on the shelf below the television, as the area where the hotel was located can be "rough," and he wanted to be prepared in case someone came through the door. The paramour is a convicted felon and he advised that he was aware that he was not allowed to possess a firearm. During the mother's interview she indicated that she became aware of the firearm once at the hotel, and she saw the paramour place it on the shelf. Although the mother advised that she believed the firearm was placed outside of the toddler's reach and she did not know it was loaded, she acknowledged being aware her paramour wanted the firearm for protection.

On October 30, 2022, the paramour was arrested and charged with culpable negligence, (being a) felon in possession of a firearm, and violation of probation. In March 2023 a warrant was issued for the mother's arrest, and she was subsequently charged with culpable negligence. The mother was later bonded out of jail and the paramour remains incarcerated; both judicial cases are ongoing at the time of this report writing.

Based on the interviews and evidence gathered during the course of the investigation, Child Protective Investigation in Pasco County closed their investigation with the following findings:

Child	Identified Maltreatment	Findings	Caregiver Responsible
Decedent	Death	Verified	Paramour
	Environmental Hazards	Verified	Mother/Paramour
	Inadequate Supervision	Verified	Mother

Other Children in the Family

Both the Pasco County Sheriff's Office Victim's Advocate and the Child Protective Investigator provided [REDACTED] to the family.

At the onset of the death investigation the mother had no other living children, but in September 2023, nearly 11 months after the death incident, the mother gave birth to another child. Contact was made with the maternal grandparents who confirmed the

mother and infant were well; however, the mother had previously obtained legal counsel and refused contact with the Department.

Of note, an investigation (2024-249558) concerning an altercation between the grandparents was received in July 2024, while the death investigation was still open and contact was made with the grandparents and the (above mentioned) infant (then 10 months old), who appeared well. The home was noted to be free of visible hazards and age-appropriate sleeping arrangements were observed. The mother continued to refuse contact with the Department and that investigation was closed with no findings of household violence threatens child.

Summary of Prior Agency Involvement with Family

There are no prior investigations involving the paramour as an adult or a caregiver within the state of Florida. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The mother was involved in three prior investigations between 2017 and 2022, and she was linked to various voluntary services throughout the family's history. [REDACTED]

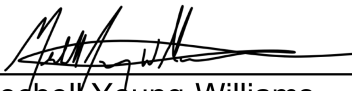
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The first investigation involving Elijah occurred in 2019 and again alleged ongoing violence between the mother and her paramour (father of both children); that investigation was closed with no findings of intimate partner violence threatens child and the family was provided service referrals. The most recent investigation occurred in 2020, alleging concerns that Elijah may have accidentally ingested one of the mother's blood pressure medications after he was able to get into her cigarette case. Additionally, there were concerns that the mother's paramour (not the decedent's father or her paramour in the death investigation) was using illicit substances. Of note, this incident also occurred while the mother, the child and her paramour were spending a few days visiting a hotel. The child was evaluated by medical professionals and there were no indications that he ingested any medication. Additionally, the mother terminated her relationship with that paramour [REDACTED]. That investigation was closed with not substantiated findings of inadequate supervision and no indicators of substance misuse-illicit drugs.



Mechell Young-Williams
Child Fatality Prevention Specialist
SunCoast Region

11/21/2024

Date

Robert W. Wilson

Robert Wilson
Operations & Management Consultant Manager
SunCoast Region

11-21-2024

Date