

## Child Fatality Summary

**Child's Name:** Jermiyah Puskac

**County:** Marion

**Date of Birth:** 11/13/2021

**Date of Death:** 04/29/2023

**Report Number:** 2023-138561

### Family Composition Chart

Name	Age at Time of the Incident	Relationship with Deceased Child
Jermiyah Puskac	1 year old	Child Victim
[REDACTED]	5 months old	Sibling
[REDACTED]	4 years old	Sibling
Tracie Puskac	36 years old	Mother
Dianne Watson	75 years old	Maternal Grandmother

### Circumstances Surrounding Death

On May 1, 2023, a report was received indicating the 1-year-old passed away from apparent physical injuries on April 29, 2023. The family had open services at the time of the child's passing.

According to the mother's re-enactment with the Marion County Sheriff's Office, the following information below was provided.

On April 26, 2023, the family had dinner at approximately 8:00 p.m. and afterward she gave the children a bath. The 1-year-old played on the floor from 9:00 to 9:30 p.m. and during this time he banged his head on the floor 2 to 3 times on purpose. She picked him up and held him tightly to calm him down. She put him to bed in his crib at approximately 10:00 p.m. She then checked on all the children at approximately 11:00 p.m. and the 1-year-old was stiff as a board and unresponsive. The mother thought he was having a seizure and held him for approximately 20 minutes. When she laid him back down his body was still tight. She did not notify anyone of the child's abnormal state.

On April 27, 2023, at approximately 7:15 a.m. the mother that the 1-year-old had not moved at all throughout the night. His body was now loose, and his lips were blue. His breathing was very shallow, and she called out to maternal grandmother to call 911, which she did at 7:16 a.m. The mother began CPR and blood came from his nose and mouth. Law Enforcement and Emergency Medical Services responded to the home, the child was transported to Advent Health Belleview, and then life flighted to Shands Pediatric Emergency Room in Gainesville.

On April 27, 2023, the Child Protection Team in Alachua completed a medical exam. Their preliminary findings were for positive for physical abuse. The toddler had multiple bruises all over his body that were consistent with abusive injury. His ophthalmology exam showed retinal hemorrhaging.

On April 29, 2023, Jermiyah Puskac was pronounced deceased at 12:35 a.m.

The mother indicated the child did not have any history of seizures and his behaviors were consistent with Autism Spectrum Disorder as he often banged his head and has sensitivity to sounds and water.

The mother consented to a drug screen and was positive for Benzodiazepines and THC. The mother has a medical marijuana card. The mother indicated the positive Benzodiazepines was due to being given a Xanax and Tramadol at the hospital a week ago for a panic attack.

Services by the Child Protection Team (CPT) were completed concerning the child death. A Specialized Interview of the 4-year-old was completed. The child was disengaged with the interview process and often needed redirection. The child made clear statements of her brother having bruises, her brother being sick, his head wobbly, and the mother having hit her brother. The 4-year-old made no clear statements of abuse or how the decedent sustained his extensive injuries. Medical evaluations of the surviving siblings were completed. Marion CPT has threat findings for physical injury to the surviving siblings due to the death of the 1-year-old and physical abuse. Marion CPT also has findings for substance misuse as the mother tested positive for THC and Benzodiazepines. The mother has a known history of substance misuse, and the children were previously removed from her for this behavior. UF CPT completed services for the decedent with verified findings for medical neglect and for severe and egregious physical abuse for the decedent to include findings of abusive head trauma, severe bruising, subdural hematomas, a skull fracture and lacerated spleen.

The Marion County Sheriff's Office investigated the death of Jermiyah Puskac (MCSO23OFF008978). On July 10, 2023, Tracie Puskac was arrested and charged with Homicide-Murder Dangerous Depraved without Premeditation.

The autopsy report was received on July 12, 2023, and indicated District 8 Medical Examiner Thomas M. Coyne, M.D., completed an autopsy of Jermiyah Puskac on May 1, 2023. ME# 23-0313.

Cause of Death: Complications of Skull Fracture, Subdural Hemorrhage, and Traumatic Brain and Spinal Cord Injury

Due To: Abusive Trauma of the Head and Neck

Manner of Death: Homicide

#### Final Neuropathological Diagnoses:

1. Global hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy
  - a. Severe cerebral edema
  - b. Evidence of downward herniation
  - c. Maceration
  - d. Diffuse acute neuronal necrosis
2. Acute supratentorial subdural hemorrhage, left hemispheric (less than 5 days duration)
3. Severe traumatic axonal injury
  - a. Axonal spheroids and varicosities of the subcortical, diencephalic, hindbrain, and
4. spinal cord white matter and spinal nerve roots

#### Autopsy Findings

1. Blunt traumatic injuries of the head and neck
  - a. Contusions of the forehead and right side of the face
  - b. Frontal subscalp hemorrhage
  - c. Dense subscalp hemorrhage of the occipital scalp region
  - d. Linear fracture of the of the occipital bone (posterior cranial fossa)
  - e. Left hemispheric supratentorial subdural hemorrhage
  - f. Acute cerebral contusion, left occipitotemporal gyri
  - g. Severe traumatic axonal injury
  - h. Acute bilateral optic nerve sheath hemorrhage
  - i. Acute bilateral retinal hemorrhages
  - j. Focal intramuscular hemorrhage left rectus capitis posterior minor and major
2. muscles
  - a. Focal hemorrhage, left side of the atlanto-occipital membrane
  - b. Partial laceration of the left alar ligament
3. Blunt trauma of the torso
  - a. Multiple ecchymoses of the anterior and posterior aspects of the torso
4. Blunt traumatic injuries of the extremities
  - a. Ecchymoses of the right arm and bilateral thighs and lower extremities
5. Hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy
  - a. Severe cerebral edema
  - b. Downward herniation
  - c. Maceration
  - d. Diffuse acute neuronal necrosis+

On July 14, 2023, the Department of Children and Families' investigation was closed with:

- Verified Findings of Death, Physical Injury, and Medical Neglect as to Jermiyah Puskac, with Tracie Puskac as the caregiver responsible.
- Verified Findings of Threatened Harm as to [REDACTED] with Tracie Puskac as the caregiver responsible.

- Not Substantiated Findings of Substance Misuse - Prescription Drugs as to Jermiyah, [REDACTED]

**Other Children in the Family:**

The siblings were deemed to be unsafe and were sheltered on April 29, 2023. The siblings continue in licensed care and are receiving case management supervision.

**Summary of Current Agency Involvement with Family**

At the time of the incident, the family had open in-home services as a result of reunification that occurred in November 2022.

**Summary of Prior Agency Involvement with Family**


[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The mother fourth child was sheltered in 2022 with the third child due to mental health and substance abuse concerns. During this dependency case, the mother completed several services to include anger management, life skills, nurturing parenting, psychological evaluation, and individual counseling. According to the psychological evaluation filed in the dependency case, the mother was diagnosed with [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] he mother was reunified with the children on November 22, 2022. Since that time, the mother has also completed an in-home parenting program and continues to engage in therapy.

  
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Central Region Child Fatality Prevention Specialist  
Kirby Morgan

\_\_\_\_\_  
9/14/23  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Central Region Director of Child Protection  
Stephanie Weis

\_\_\_\_\_  
9/14/23  
Date