

## Minnesota Safe Passage for Children Child Fatality Report 2023-2024

**Name of Child Victim:** Ahziyas Solo-Dampha

**County:** Freeborn County

**Date of Death:** 07/06/2023

**Date of Birth:** 04/21/2021

**Age:** 2 years

**Adult Perpetrator:** Mother's paramour

**Abuse type:** Physical abuse

### **Summary:**

On July 6, 2023, police responded to multiple calls about an unresponsive child. When they arrived on the scene, first responders found 2 year old Ahziyas Solo-Dampha unresponsive and began life-saving measures. Ahziyas' mother was at work and received an alarming message from her boyfriend of a year, who was watching Ahziyas and his 12 week old sibling.<sup>43</sup> He explained that Ahziyas fell down the stairs and injured himself. After Ahziyas' mother asked for photos multiple times, her boyfriend sent a photo of an unresponsive Ahziyas with bruises on his face and blood on his lips. By the time Ahziyas' mother returned home, her boyfriend had barricaded himself inside the apartment. Ahziyas' mother forced her way into the home, saw her child unresponsive, and called the police.

Upon police arrival, Ahziyas' mother's boyfriend fled the scene with Ahziyas' sibling. Police detained him nine blocks away. With significant bruising around Ahziyas' sibling's neck noted, the sibling's age of vulnerability, and a suspicion for child physical abuse, Ahziah's sibling was transferred to the hospital for a physical examination. Ahziyas' sibling's right eye was swollen, there was bruising on various parts of his body, and he had bite marks on his right knee and left hand. Further medical examination of Ahziyas' sibling revealed over 17 broken ribs in various stages of healing. Some ribs were broken in more than one place.

Ahziyas was pronounced dead within two hours of the original 911 call. His autopsy revealed injuries to his head and abdomen: rib fractures, a liver laceration, a transected pancreas, contusions throughout the face and neck, multiple subgaleal hemorrhages, and hematomas. The cause of death was listed as multiple blunt force injuries and Ahziyas' death was ruled a homicide.

Ahziyas' mother's boyfriend was arrested, charged with Second Degree Murder and Assault in the Third Degree, and ordered to have no contact with Ahziyas' mother and his sibling. In the days after Ahziyas' death, Ahziyas' mother's boyfriend made or received multiple phone calls while in jail from his mother and sister where he admitted to punching Ahziyas in the head multiple times and kicking him in the side. Ahziyas' mother's boyfriend was released on bail a week later. In September 2023, he pleaded guilty to both charges and was sentenced to 25 years for Ahziyas' murder and a concurrent 32 months for Ahziyas' sibling's physical abuse.

In an interview with Ahziyas' mother, it was revealed that her boyfriend was physically abusive towards Ahziyas' mother and was "heavy handed" with the children. She reported previous episodes where her boyfriend used more force than necessary. The physical abuse intensified when Ahziyas' sibling was born, causing Ahziyas' mother to leave the state with the children a couple weeks before Ahziyas' death. She returned home when her boyfriend texted her that he would leave her alone. He did not leave her alone. Four days before Ahziyas' death, Ahziyas' mother's boyfriend stomped on Ahziyas' mother's right shoulder before dragging her into the apartment where he continued assaulting her. She went to the Emergency Room for treatment and told them she fell; shoulder bruising was evident during her interview. Even after this, Ahziyas' mother's boyfriend was allowed to watch the children four times a week for around five hours at a time.

Ahziyas' mother blamed her boyfriend's methamphetamine use for the domestic abuse she experienced, stating that they got into an argument about the drug use the day before Ahziyas' death. Ahziyas' mother stated that, when her boyfriend uses methamphetamine, she attempts to have her family members watch the children, since her boyfriend is the most violent when effects of the drug are waning. It was reported that Ahziyas was wary of his mother's boyfriend and that multiple family members talked to Ahziyas' mother about her boyfriend's treatment of the children. Ahziyas' mother said, "I should have known something would happen," in the aftermath of Ahziyas' death. Despite those remarks, Ahziyas' mother stated she never noticed any abuse or red flags of abuse by her boyfriend during the same interview.

### **Previous History:**

Ahziyas' mother's boyfriend had a history of violence. In 2019, he beat the mother of his other children so badly that her spleen ruptured, requiring emergency surgery. In the child protection investigation pertaining to that incident, Ahziyas' mother's boyfriend did not show a willingness to change his violent behavior. In 2020, he signed a Consent to Adopt for his child from a previous relationship after learning that the Freeborn County Department of Human Services (FCDHS) was filing a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) for failing to demonstrate a willingness to follow the case plan and change his

violent behavior.<sup>44</sup> In 2022, his parental rights were voluntarily terminated for another child due to his unwillingness to follow his second child's case plan and his continued violent behavior. During this time, Ahzias' mother's boyfriend violated two of his three DANCOs.

When Ahzias' younger sibling was born, FCDHS received a Birth Match, meaning that, because of previous documented history, Ahzias' and his sibling were considered at risk of harm or danger, and CPS involvement was warranted. The case intake was initiated for Ahzias' mother's boyfriend due to his previous TPR,<sup>45</sup> but the case was screened out for "not meeting criteria" since the TPR was voluntary and Ahzias' mother's boyfriend was reportedly not living with Ahzias' mother and Ahzias.

Ahzias' death was not Ahzias' mother's first contact with CPS. In March 2022, a Family Assessment was opened after a domestic altercation between Ahzias' mother and Ahzias' biological father. Ahzias' mother was holding Ahzias when Ahzias' father assaulted her. During the assessment, a DANCO was put into place for Ahzias' mother, but she soon wanted the DANCO lifted. She was offered community resources and the case was closed late May 2022. After Ahzias' death, a CHIPS case was opened for Ahzias' surviving sibling. Ahzias' sibling was placed in foster care until Trial Home Visits (THV) began the following month. The THV was stopped after the county learned that Ahzias' mother was in contact with her boyfriend, for whom there was a DANCO in place, and was allowing unsafe individuals into her home. A year after Ahzias' death, Ahzias' mother had a third child with a second boyfriend. A Family Assessment was opened because of Ahzias' mother's multiple maltreatment determinations received for Ahzias' death. The new child's father had a history of domestic violence and was eventually sentenced to prison for domestic assault in another matter. Eventually Ahzias' mother received returned custody of Ahzias' sibling, and both cases were closed early 2025. Ahzias' mother's boyfriend's parental rights were terminated for Ahzias' sibling in February 2025.

Evidence shows that Ahzias' mother's boyfriend was not a safe parent or partner. He ignored the many opportunities he was offered to address his violent and dangerous behaviors. These behaviors led to Ahzias' death and the violent assault of Ahzias' mother and sibling. When Ahzias' new sibling was born and Ahzias' mother's boyfriend's birth match was triggered, FCDHS had opportunities to mitigate the harm before Ahzias' death. The termination of parental rights is a serious process, not taken lightly by the courts, and usually results from significant parental abuse and/or neglect. It is common for parents to agree to "voluntary" TPRs because the parent is told that a decision by the court for an involuntary TPR is imminent. Ahzias' mother's boyfriend's previous TPR was due to his violent behavior, so that alone is a reason for more aggressive action by the child welfare system. If nothing else, the authorities should

have realized that Ahziyas' mother's boyfriend would have unsupervised access to his own child, even if he didn't live with Ahziyas, his mother, and Ahziyas' infant sibling.

Ahziyas' mother made a series of poor decisions that put her children at risk. Her boyfriend's violence sent her to the hospital. Her baby had broken ribs healing at different stages; it is likely Ahziyas' sibling was visibly in pain with common care provided for an infant because of these injuries. Multiple family members spoke with Ahziyas' mother about her boyfriend's behavior and were willing to help. Ahziyas' mother crossed state lines to escape her abusive relationship yet returned later. After all of this, she allowed her boyfriend to have unsupervised contact with her young children. Even in the aftermath of Ahziyas' death, Ahziyas' mother continued to have contact with her son's killer by breaching the DANCO put in place for her protection. Once her boyfriend was incarcerated, she immediately began a relationship with another man who eventually went to prison for domestic assault. Despite offers for services to ensure her and her children's safety, she chose not to act. Child safety cannot be voluntary. When a parent is unable to identify safety concerns, the system is obliged to do so.