

Minnesota Safe Passage for Children Child Fatality Report 2023-2024

Name of Child Victim: Eastyn Deronjic

County: Clay County

Date of Death: 03/18/2024

Date of Birth: 01/19/2021

Age: 3 years

Adult Perpetrator: Mother's friend (caregiver)

Abuse type: Physical Abuse

Summary:

On March 18, 2024, first responders responded to a call for an unresponsive toddler, 3 year old Eastyn Deronjic. At the scene, it was reported that the toddler drank some water and started coughing and gagging before becoming unresponsive. Eastyn died less than two hours later. Officers on the scene noted that Eastyn was heavily bruised on his face and body. His autopsy outlined 28 blunt force injuries. Eastyn died from peritonitis due to a bowel perforation from one of these injuries.

Eastyn and his younger sibling lived with his mother's friend, Caretaker 1, and Caretaker 1's significant other, Caretaker 2, in an unofficial arrangement that was in effect for over a year. Leading up to his death, Eastyn was very ill, with Caretaker 1 saying he was vomiting, struggling to breath, and having diarrhea starting two days before his death. On the night of his death, Caretaker 2 suggested taking Eastyn to the hospital after getting advice from her mother. Caretaker 1 refused, saying Eastyn was fine. Instead of taking Eastyn to the hospital, Caretaker 1 took Caretaker 2 to the hospital because she fell ill from cannabis use. Caretaker 1's mother was watching Eastyn and his sibling when Eastyn became unresponsive.

Both Caretakers were charged with second degree murder for Eastyn's death. Caretaker 1 pleaded guilty to second degree murder and was sentenced to 240 months in prison, which is an upward durational departure for sentencing. At the time of writing, Caretaker 2 is awaiting trial.

Leading to Eastyn's death, multiple adults either witnessed Caretaker 1 assault Eastyn or saw bruising on his body. Caretaker 2 witnessed Eastyn suffer physical abuse by Caretaker 1 at least once, even standing in front of Eastyn to prevent the assault and was assaulted in his place. Eastyn's mother saw bruising on her child during past visits, but accepted the explanation that Eastyn was clumsy. She even defended Caretaker 1

when two of her friends expressed worry about Eastyn's safety. Eastyn's paternal grandparents visited with him frequently and reported that they saw bruising on his stomach, legs, and back a week before his death. When they asked about it, Caretaker 1 said Eastyn fell off his bike. Caretaker 1's mother told police that she saw Caretaker 1 scream at, slap, flick, and spank Eastyn. She also noticed a black bruise on Eastyn's genitals less than a week before his death and was told this was due to Eastyn falling off his bike. In the CHIPS petition filed for Eastyn's younger sibling after Eastyn's death, multiple photographs of Eastyn and his sibling with bruises on them were given to the county. In the fatality disclosure from Clay County, it stated that there were no reports of maltreatment made to Clay County in the 12 months prior to Eastyn's death.

Although there were not any mandated reporters interfacing with Eastyn due to his age and unofficial living situation, there were at least seven trusted adults who knew, or had reason to believe, that Eastyn was being physically abused. This was flagged by both our Medical and Legal SMEs. Because none of these adults called for help or assistance from police or CPS, there was no way for the child welfare system to know about or intervene in Eastyn's situation. There were missed opportunities for notifying Child Protection, medical providers, or the police that could have saved Eastyn's life.

Previous History: -----