

Office of the Inspector General Report to the Governor and General Assembly (Jan. 2023)

OIG2023 #87

Child No. 87	DOB: 03/2007	DOD: 01/2022	Accident
Age at death:	14 years		
Cause of death:	Heroin and fentanyl intoxication		
Reason for review:	Pending child protection investigation at time of child’s death; three unfounded child protection investigations within one year of child’s death		
Action taken:	Full investigation pending		
<p><u>Narrative:</u> Fourteen-year-old was found unresponsive by her mother around 9:30am. Emergency responders found the teen in her mother’s bedroom, wedged between the wall and bed, and noted the home had dirty dishes in the sink, mouse traps, and stagnant water in the bathtub. Three days earlier, the teen had tested positive for COVID. The mother reported she had woken the teen from a nightmare around 4:00am and encouraged her to go back to sleep. DCFS investigated the teen’s death and indicated the mother for death by neglect, environmental neglect, and substantial risk of physical injury/environment injurious to health and welfare by neglect.</p>			
<p><u>Reason for Review:</u> In June 2021, DCFS received a report that the teen’s mother and her paramour used drugs, allowed a 20-year-old neighbor to hit and discipline the children, and the children were malnourished. The mother denied drug use and agreed to obtain an order of protection against her former paramour, who she stated threatened to call DCFS when she ended the relationship. The CPI documented the teen, her 4-year-old sister, and her 7-year-old brother appeared healthy, free of marks or bruises, and denied witnessing their mother use drugs or alcohol. The CPI noted there was adequate food in the home and no concerns about the environment. A neighbor reported no knowledge of drug use in the home and stated the mother was a good parent. The CPI spoke with the mother’s former paramour, who recanted his report to the Hotline. In July 2021, while the first investigation was pending, DCFS received a report that the family home was unsanitary, had dead rodents, food left out, and had a foul smell. The next day, the CPI noted the home did not appear as described in the Hotline report and had no observable safety hazards. In August 2021, DCFS received a report that there were bags with a white powdery residue and straws hidden throughout the home, and there were domestic violence incidents in the home, but the children were always outside and did not witness the incidents. The report was taken for additional information on the second investigation. Two days later, law enforcement reported to DCFS that they responded to a report of an altercation between the mother and the former paramour. Law enforcement confirmed the mother obtained an order of protection against the former paramour. That month, DCFS unfounded the first investigation for substantial risk of physical injury/environment injurious to health and welfare by neglect. DCFS unfounded the second investigation for inadequate supervision, environmental neglect, and medical neglect as mother had obtained an order of protection and had a negative toxicology screen. In November 2021, DCFS received a report that the teen, who had autism, had been living with her father for four days, he left the teen alone 10 to 12 hours, and did not have appropriate food as the teen had allergies. DCFS opened a third investigation. The father reported he knew of the teen’s allergies and provided appropriate food, the teen had a physical exam scheduled for that day, and the teen did not have autism but had ADHD. The teen reported she felt safe with her father but uncomfortable in the home because she had never lived with only him; there was always food for her, her father asked a neighbor to check on her when she was home alone, and she knew who to call in an emergency. The CPI observed adequate food in the home. The teen’s paternal grandmother reported she picked the teen up at school daily and watched her until the father finished work. In December 2021, DCFS unfounded the third investigation for inadequate food and inadequate supervision. Four days after the third investigation opened, DCFS received a report that the teen’s mother had been arrested and law enforcement found drug residue in her car. The next day, the CPI found the teen’s 5-year-old and 7-year-old siblings home alone. A neighbor reported the children had been told to go to his home after school because the mother had to work, but the children denied being given those instructions. The CPI interviewed the mother later that evening and the mother stated she arranged for the children to go to the neighbor’s home after school, and denied the drugs were hers as she had borrowed</p>			

the car from a friend. The investigation remained pending at the time the teen died. DCFS later unfounded the investigation for substantial risk of physical injury/ environment injurious to health and welfare by neglect.