

Office of the Inspector General Report to the Governor and General Assembly (Jan. 2024)

OIG2024 #12

Child No. 12	DOB: 03/2021	DOD: 10/2022	Homicide
Age at death:	19 months		
Cause of death:	Nutritional neglect		
Alleged perpetrator:	Mother		
Reason for review:	Unfounded child protection investigation within one year of child's death		
Action taken:	Investigatory review of records		
<p><u>Narrative:</u> Nineteen-month-old was found unresponsive in his crib by his maternal aunt. First responders were unable to resuscitate the toddler. The toddler's mother reported she saw him alive at 9:00am and his aunt arrived around 11:00am to care for him when his mother went to work. The aunt stated she checked on him around 2:00pm and found him unresponsive. The coroner initially suspected the toddler had been deceased for at least 12 hours. First responders also noted the home smelled of animal urine and feces and there were feces visible in the home, including in and underneath the toddler's crib. Four months earlier, the toddler was diagnosed with failure to thrive, and his mother was connected to the WIC program. He attended three follow-up appointments with his primary care doctor but missed a fourth appointment four days before his death. At autopsy, the toddler weighed only 9.5 lbs., his stomach was empty, and he only had a small, hard stool in his large intestine. The mother reported they only had two animals in the home, and it was the aunt's responsibility to clean up after them. DCFS indicated the toddler's mother for death by abuse (#1) and failure to thrive (#81). DCFS indicated both the toddler's mother and aunt for inadequate food (#76) and environmental neglect (#82). Police arrested the mother and she had been charged with first degree murder and felony child endangerment.</p>			
<p><u>Reason for Review:</u> In November 2021, DCFS received a report that law enforcement responded to a call that the toddler's 15-year-old maternal uncle was breaking into cars. Police found the uncle in dirty clothing and smelling of urine. The uncle stated he was breaking into cars to find money for food. He told police he had been kicked out of the home of his mother, so he had been living with his sister, the toddler's mother. However, he got in trouble for not doing chores, so he slept in a shed with a heater, and he preferred that arrangement. The toddler's mother told police she kicked the uncle out of the home and stated he slept in the shed for one night as a punishment. The CPI attempted to see the family but found no one at the home. Law enforcement told the CPI the uncle stated he chose to live with the toddler's mother, he chose to stay in the shed, and the toddler's mother provided him food and allowed him into the home to use the bathroom. The officer reported the uncle was dirty and malodorous, but he had no injuries and denied abuse. The CPI eventually met with the toddler's mother at home, who stated the uncle was only supposed to stay in the shed for one night, but he continued to stay there. While at the home, the CPI noted the then 10-month-old toddler appeared healthy, well cared for, and free of visible injuries. However, the CPI documented the home had a bad odor and was swarming with flies, the family had 10 cats and a dog living in the home, the litter box was full of feces, and there were also feces on the floor. The CPI instructed the toddler's mother to clean the home. The CPI met with the uncle at a behavioral health center, and he confirmed he preferred to stay in the shed. Staff at a behavioral health center reported the uncle had been accepted at a residential treatment center out of state. The toddler's pediatrician reported he had been seen recently, he was up to date on his immunizations, and he had not missed any appointments. The pediatrician noted the toddler had normal growth but was slightly delayed and had not started crawling. DCFS unfounded the toddler's mother and maternal grandmother for inadequate supervision (#74).</p>			