

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

OIG2024 #13

Child No. 13	DOB: 09/2019	DOD: 10/2022	Homicide
Age at death:	3 years		
Cause of death:	Blunt force injury to the head due to victim of child abuse		
Alleged perpetrator:	Stepmother		
Reason for review:	Pending child protection investigation at time of child's death; return home and intact family services case within one year of child's death		
Action taken:	Full investigation pending		
<u>Narrative:</u> Three-year-old was found not breathing when his father arrived to pick him up from his stepmother. His father removed him from the car, attempted CPR, then went to the fire station for assistance. Hospital staff reported the toddler's body was cool to the touch upon arrival. The toddler's autopsy report noted he died of blunt force injuries. The stepmother stated the toddler's 4-year-old brother was jumping on the toddler, and she removed the toddler, the 4-year-old, and their 22-month-old brother from the couch to separate them. DCFS indicated the toddler's stepmother for death by abuse (#1) and substantial risk of physical injury/environment injurious to health and welfare by neglect (#60). DCFS unfounded the father and stepmother for death by neglect (#51) and unfounded the father for substantial risk of physical injury/environment injurious to health and welfare by neglect (#60). The toddler's stepmother has been sentenced to 11 years in prison for involuntary manslaughter.			
<u>Reason for Review:</u> In September 2021, DCFS opened an intact family services case after DCFS indicated the toddler's biological mother for substantial risk of physical injury/environment injurious to health and welfare by neglect (#60) after concerns about the mother's drug use. The then 2-year-old toddler was placed with his maternal uncle under a safety plan, and the mother was required to complete three negative drug tests and a substance use assessment to end the safety plan. In March 2022, the toddler's uncle expressed concern that the safety plan had not yet ended. In April 2022, the intact worker noted the mother was non-compliant with services, and the court granted DCFS custody of the toddler, and he remained in his uncle's care. The placement worker met with the toddler's father, who had recently established paternity, and the toddler began visits with his father. At the end of August 2022, DCFS placed the toddler with his father and stepmother. In September 2022, the toddler's mother expressed concern about bruises to the toddler. The toddler's father reported the bruises were from the toddler playing with the other children in the home. In October 2022, the court closed the placement case; DCFS continued to provide aftercare services. One week before the toddler's death, DCFS received a report that the toddler presented at school with a swollen lip; a lump on his forehead; a scratch by his ear; and bruising on his forehead, sternum, and left shin. The reporter stated the toddler, though limited in speech, provided the family dog's name when asked who bruised him but nodded his head yes when the reporter asked if his stepmother injured him. The CPI visited the home and met with the toddler, his four stepsiblings and paternal half-siblings, and the father and stepmother. The 9-year-old sibling stated the toddler may have been hurt from falling off a porch. The 11-year-old sibling stated the toddler may have been injured from the trampoline or slide, or because the 9-year-old hit people. Both denied their parents hurt them and stated they felt safe at home. The CPI observed the toddler's injuries and noted he did not have a swollen lip but did have a raised bump and bruise on his head, scratches, typical knee bruising, and a bruise to the chest. The toddler's stepmother reported the toddler's head was struck by a door between the kitchen and dining room when the toddler's 23-month-old brother pushed the door open while the toddler was standing behind it. She stated the toddler's other injuries were likely from normal play. The father stated he was not home at the time of the incident, but the stepmother informed him of the incident with the door. The father took the toddler to the hospital for evaluation, and the hospital discharged him. Six days later, while the investigation remained pending, the toddler died. DCFS later indicated the toddler's stepmother for cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions, and oral injuries by neglect (#61).			

