

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

OIG2024 #32

Child No. 32	DOB: 05/2021	DOD: 04/2023	Homicide
Age at death:	22 months		
Cause of death:	Blunt force trauma to the abdomen due to child abuse		
Alleged perpetrator:	Unsolved		
Reason for review:	Child was a youth in care; indicated child protection investigation within one year of child's death		
Action taken:	Full investigation pending		
<u>Narrative:</u> Twenty-two-month-old was found unresponsive, face down, on an adult bed. The toddler was a youth in care placed with his maternal grandmother. The day of his death, the toddler's family members reported his grandmother brought him to his mother's home for a visit before the mother left for work. The grandmother then left the toddler in the care of his 23-year-old maternal aunt. The aunt stated she left the toddler in the care of her paramour while she left the home for approximately 20 minutes to pick up the toddler's 8-year-old sister from school. The toddler was transported by ambulance to the hospital, where he was pronounced deceased. The court granted DCFS temporary custody of the toddler's sister. Both criminal and DCFS investigations of the toddler's death remain pending. Reason for Review: In July 2022, DCFS received a report that the toddler's mother brought the then 13-month-old toddler to the hospital for seizures. The child had been born prematurely and experienced seizures, developmental delays, and a heart defect since birth. A scan done at the hospital found the toddler had a skull fracture and brain bleed. The reporter noted the toddler had been seen for multiple issues in recent weeks, including fever, lack of appetite, lack of urination or defecation, and seizures. The toddler's mother stated she did not know what happened, and the toddler's 20-year-old maternal aunt also cared for him. The maternal aunt told the reporter that three weeks earlier, the toddler fell out of her arms, on his back, on a hardwood floor, from a height of approximately two feet. She stated she informed the mother immediately. The reporter noted the injuries were not consistent with the explanation. The reporter stated the toddler's 7-year-old sister usually lived in the home but was elsewhere over the summer. She stated the day before coming to the hospital, the toddler slept more than normal and appeared to be having seizures that did not resemble prior seizures. The mother told the CPI the toddler did not show signs of injury after the fall the aunt reported. The CPI and medical staff noted the mother's interactions with the toddler appeared appropriate. Treating physicians reported the toddler had complex fractures on multiple parts of his skull and bilateral bleeding in the brain which appeared to be more recent than the reported timeframe. The aunt reported she lived with the mother and cared for the children when the mother worked. She denied she hurt the toddler. The aunt reported the toddler did not cry for long, did not show any visible injuries, and acted normal. She denied knowledge of how the toddler obtained his injuries. The court granted DCFS temporary custody of the toddler and DCFS placed the toddler with his maternal grandmother, who had been caring for the toddler's then 7-year-old sister since earlier that summer. The CPI observed the home was appropriate, provided a pack-and-play, and discussed safe sleep. The maternal grandmother denied any concerns that the mother would hurt or allow anyone else to hurt her children. DCFS indicated the toddler's mother and aunt for head injuries by neglect (#52). The mother successfully appealed the finding. During the placement case, the placement worker noted the toddler was non-verbal, required assistance to walk, and could not hold a bottle or feed himself. The toddler's sister appeared free from developmental delays. The mother reported she visited the children daily. In December 2022, the mother was granted unsupervised visits and the court returned the 7-year-old sister to the mother's care. The mother was enrolled in parenting classes, but her attendance was inconsistent due to her work schedule. The toddler was enrolled in occupational, speech, and developmental therapy services. The mother engaged in domestic violence services and individual therapy. Throughout the placement case, the family reported the mother visited the maternal grandmother's home daily and stayed until bedtime, and the grandmother reported no concerns about the mother's ability to care for the toddler.			

