

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

OIG2024 #47

Child No. 47	DOB: 07/2022	DOD: 08/2022	Undetermined
Age at death:	4 weeks		
Cause of death:	Sudden unexplained infant death; significant contributing condition of unsafe sleeping environment		
Reason for review:	Open intact family services case at time of child's death; three unfounded child protection investigations within one year of child's death		
Action taken:	Investigatory review of records		
<p><u>Narrative:</u> Four-week-old was found not breathing; her family called 911 and began CPR. The newborn was transported to the hospital by ambulance, where she was pronounced deceased. The mother's paramour cared for the newborn that night while the mother worked. He stated he put the newborn to sleep in her bassinet. The reporter stated the newborn was found on her back, turned to the left, with a rolled-up towel under her neck, and the bassinet contained blankets, a pacifier, and a small bottle. The paramour stated he thought he was helping the newborn by propping up her head with a towel to prevent her from choking. The newborn was treated at the hospital a few days earlier after she choked while swallowing, coughed up blood, and had a lot of mucus. DCFS investigated and unfounded the newborn's mother and her paramour for death by neglect (#51) and substantial risk of physical injury/environment injurious to health and welfare by neglect (#60).</p> <p>Reason for Review: In September 2021, DCFS received a report that police responded to a domestic disturbance between the mother and her former paramour, the father of the newborn's then 21-month-old sister. The mother reported a verbal altercation started in the car while the sister was in the backseat. The mother and her paramour went into the home and left the child in the car, and the altercation became physical. The reporter noted injuries on both the mother and the former paramour. Police arrested the mother for domestic battery. The sister's father told the CPI that the parents argued because he did not want the mother to use marijuana. He stated he could always see the sister in the car. Law enforcement reported they arrested the mother because she refused to leave the home. They reported it was difficult to tell who instigated the argument and no charges were filed. The mother told the CPI she had mental health issues but did not take medication. She stated she used marijuana but no other drugs, and she was engaged in virtual counseling. The CPI observed the sister who appeared well cared for with no observable injuries. DCFS unfounded the investigation for substantial risk of physical injury/environment injurious to health and welfare by neglect (#60) and inadequate supervision (#74). In March 2022, DCFS received a report that the mother and her new paramour had a domestic dispute while driving, during which the paramour struck the mother in the face, and the newborn's then 2-year-old sister was in the car. The reporter noted the mother was pregnant. The paramour fled the scene and was later charged with aggravated domestic battery. The mother told the CPI that she allowed the paramour to borrow her car, but he did not return it in time, and he slapped her in the face when she confronted him. She stated she called police, and the sister was in the backseat and unharmed. The mother added she ended the relationship with the paramour. The CPI observed a scratch on the mother's face and noted the sister appeared well cared for. The mother reported they lacked stable housing and lived in a shelter. She agreed to intact family services. DCFS unfounded the investigation against the mother for substantial risk of physical injury/environment injurious to health and welfare by neglect (#60). While that investigation was pending, DCFS received a report that the newborn's sister returned to her mother's care after a weeklong visit with her father, and she had a bruise to her buttock. The reporter added the sister's father previously hit his 7-year-old son with a paddle. The CPI met with the sister's father and his son at home. The son denied he received physical punishment and stated he felt safe at home. The CPI noted no signs of abuse or neglect. Both the father and his paramour stated the sister fell while she was playing at the park. The mother stated she observed bruising to the sister after a visit with her father, but the sister could not tell her what happened. The mother told the CPI she obtained an order of protection against the sister's father for herself, but the judge ordered visitation between the sister and her father every other week. The CPI observed the sister had faint marks on her right knee, outer right thigh, and right buttock. DCFS unfounded the</p>			

investigation against the sister's father for cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions, and oral injuries by abuse (#11). At the time the intact case opened, the mother stated she was approved to stay at the shelter for six weeks with possible extensions. The mother's intact worker recommended housing resources, mental health assessment, counseling, and 0-3 developmental screening. In June 2022, the mother moved into the home of the newborn's maternal great-grandmother and reported she was pregnant and due in July. The intact worker discussed safe sleep with the mother and provided a bassinet and a pack-and-play. The great-grandmother reported feeling overwhelmed with the family moving into her home and the intact worker and supervisor discussed housing options. In July 2022, the intact worker made an unannounced visit to the home and learned the mother was at the hospital to give birth. After the birth, the intact worker continued bi-weekly visits with the family. The mother and her paramour were exploring alternative housing arrangements but continued to live with the great-grandmother after the infant was born. The intact worker visited the home three days prior to the infant's death and noted no concerns.