Minnesota Safe Passage for Children Child Fatality Report 2023-2024

Name of Child Victim: Jackson Weidell

County: Ramsey County

Date of Death: 12/25/2024

Date of Birth: 06/04/2023

Age: 18 months

Adult Perpetrator: Parents

Abuse type: Neglect

Summary:

On Christmas Day 2024, officers responded to a call for an unresponsive child, 18 month old Jackson Weidell. While supervising his children, Jackson's father fell asleep surrounded by the tin foil he used to smoke fentanyl while Jackson's mother was in the shower. After getting out of the shower, Jackson's mother found Jackson lying on his father's head, unresponsive. Jackson had ingested his father's fentanyl. Jackson's mother called 911 and administered Narcan. Although first responders attempted lifesaving measures, Jackson died about an hour after they arrived on the scene. Jackson's autopsy concluded that fentanyl toxicity caused his death.

During the incident, police noticed a dirty home, the presence of drugs, and drug paraphernalia. Jackson's infant sibling was found in an old, dirty diaper and had a white substance on his forehead. Jackson's 4 year old sibling was found sitting on top of another piece of tin foil with fentanyl residue. Both of Jackson's siblings tested positive for fentanyl exposure later that day. Police reported that Jackson's mother seemed under the influence at the scene. A later search warrant found methamphetamine, fentanyl, drug paraphernalia, and shotgun shells in the home.

Previous History:

Jackson's family has a long history with child protection services due to Jackson's mother's chronic substance abuse. This includes two previous voluntary Terminations of Parental Rights (TPR) for Jackson's mother in 2018 and a maltreatment determination in 2020 due to her prenatal exposure of Jackson's older sibling to amphetamines and opiates. During the 2020 investigation, both parents received in-patient addiction treatment and experienced a period of sobriety before being reunited with Jackson's sibling. Jackson's parents have a tumultuous relationship. From April 2022 to May 2024, Jackson's father filed four petitions for Orders for Protection (OFPs) against Jackson's

mother. Jackson's mother filed one against Jackson's father. Each parent alleged that the other was emotionally abusive, physically abusive, and actively using narcotics. Jackson's mother reported that Jackson's father physically harmed her while holding Jackson's older sibling. Jackson's father reported that Jackson's mother chased him with scissors. None of these petitions resulted in issuance of an OFP since Jackson's parents seemingly reconciled each time. One of our Guardians ad Litem (GAL) SMEs wrote that Jackson's parent's fraught interpersonal history, as evidenced by multiple petitions for OFPs going both ways, should have been a red flag for Ramsey County Social Services Department (RCSSD) when researching Jackson's family, along with the multiple previous TPRs for Jackson's mother.

On December 1, 2024, RCSSD was notified that Jackson's infant sibling was born addicted to fentanyl; Jackson's mother admitted to using the day prior. RCSSD established a safety plan that made Jackson's father the gatekeeper for his wife's drug abuse. As noted by one of our Legal SMEs, this was a seemingly reckless decision considering his previous substance abuse and absent an effort to confirm his sobriety with a urine toxicology test. Jackson's mother was then not allowed unsupervised contact with the children nor allowed in the home during her drug use. Jackson's infant sibling was released from the hospital to his father's care six days before Jackson's death. The next day, RCSSD used their discretion and visited Jackson's home in a scheduled rather than an unannounced visit, which gave Jackson's parents time to present a façade of progress. RCSSD deemed it a safe environment for the children to live in. Jackson died five days later.

During her interview after Jackson's death, Jackson's mother said she lied about Jackson's father's sobriety. Both parents were in active addiction, and both parents used fentanyl Christmas morning, the day of Jackson's death. Both parents were charged with Second Degree Manslaughter. At the time of writing, Jackson's mother pled guilty and Jackson's father is awaiting trial.

Multiple SMEs– Child Welfare Research, Legal, and GAL– said RCSSD did not decide in favor of child safety. In this scenario, Jackson and his siblings should have been put into foster care, and a CHIPs petition should be filed.