Child Fatality Summary

Child's Name: Nova Nichols

County: Orange

Date of Birth: 01/19/2025

Date of Death: 04/30/2025

Report Number: 2025-152852

Family Composition Chart

Name	Age at Time of the Incident	Relationship with Deceased Child
Nova Nichols	3 ½ months old	Child Victim
Angelina Lieffring	20 years old	Mother
Darius Nichols	20 years old	Father
[redacted]	56 years old	Maternal Grandmother
[redacted]	60 years old	Maternal Grandfather

Circumstances Surrounding Death

On May 1, 2025, a report was received regarding the death of a three-and-a-half-month-old infant, Nova. The report indicated that Nova was found unresponsive on April 30, 2025, by her father. She was transported to Nemours Children's Hospital PICU at approximately 11:45 a.m., where LCSW McGriff confirmed she arrived unresponsive. A skeletal survey conducted at that time revealed rib fractures. Subsequent medical examinations confirmed multiple skull fractures, rib fractures, and petechiae in the eyes. An autopsy completed on May 1, 2025, revealed multiple acute skull fractures, bilateral retinal hemorrhages, and multiple healing rib fractures consistent with prior abuse.

OCSO Homicide Detective Robles confirmed the above injuries and instructed that DCF refrain from interviewing family members at that time. A search warrant executed at the residence revealed a strong odor of marijuana. Measurements taken of the couch, where the father reported placing the infant prior to using the bathroom, indicated a height of 20 ¾ inches. Investigators located fentanyl pills inside a bookbag in the bathroom, which the father reported using after placing Nova on the couch. A forensic review of the father's phone revealed a text message sent at 9:40 a.m. to a friend, Ian, warning that police would be searching the residence and urging him to retrieve belongings. On May 5, 2025, the father, identified as Darius, was arrested and charged with Aggravated Child Abuse and First-Degree Murder.

In his initial statement to law enforcement, Darius reported that he placed Nova on the couch before using the bathroom. He stated that he heard a "bang" followed by silence and upon returning, found the infant on the floor unresponsive. He claimed that while running upstairs to seek help, he slipped, causing Nova to strike her head a second time. He reported that he awakened the mother, Angelina, who called her father. According to his account, Angelina's father instructed them to perform CPR and contact

911. Darius stated that they sought assistance from a neighbor, who contacted 911, after which EMS transported Nova to Nemours.

On May 6, 2025, Detective Robles reported that Darius admitted during an interview to “crushing Nova’s skull with his hands.” Clearance was subsequently provided for DCF to conduct an interview. Later that day, CPI Rigby interviewed Darius at the Orange County Jail. During the interview, Darius confirmed that he resided with Nova’s mother and maternal grandparents and described himself as the primary caregiver during late-night and early-morning hours. He stated that on April 29, 2025, the maternal grandparents traveled out of state for a wedding. That evening, he, Angelina, and his friend Ian watched a movie, and Ian remained at the home overnight. Darius reported that Nova awoke once that night, was fed, and went back to sleep.

On April 30, 2025, at approximately 8:30 a.m., Darius reported that Nova awoke crying. He took her downstairs to prepare a bottle while Angelina remained asleep. He observed Ian preparing to leave for work. Darius attempted to feed Nova, but stated she refused the bottle and continued crying. He reported that he attempted to soothe her by rocking and patting her back and then placed her on the couch before going to the bathroom. He stated that he later returned to find Nova on the floor, unresponsive, with a head injury.

During subsequent questioning by law enforcement, Darius recanted his initial account after being presented with autopsy findings and graphic images. He admitted to providing investigators with statements he believed they “wanted to hear” and demonstrated on a doll how he had crushed Nova’s head. When questioned regarding the rib fractures, he suggested that the injuries could have resulted from the way he picked Nova up, specifically by grasping her torso with both hands. He denied ever observing signs of pain or injury associated with these actions.

On April 30, 2025, the child was pronounced deceased at 11:01 p.m.

The Orange County Sheriff’s Office investigated the death of the child (2025-023391). On May 5, 2025, the father was arrested and charged with Aggravated Child Abuse and second-Degree Murder.

The death certificate was received on May 27, 2025, and indicated District 9 Medical Examiner Joshua D. Stephany, M.D., signed and certified the death certificate for the child on May 14, 2025. ME# 25-09-0715.

The autopsy report indicated District 9 Medical Examiner Joshua D. Stephany, M.D., completed an autopsy of the child. ME# 25-09-0715.

Cause of Death: Blunt Head Trauma

Manner of Death: Homicide

On September 17, 2025, the Department of Children and Families' investigation was closed with:

- Verified Death and Physical Injury as to the child, Nova.

Other Children in the Family:

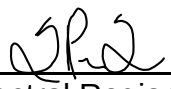
The are no surviving siblings. Grief counseling information was provided to the family.

Summary of Current Agency Involvement with Family

The family did not have any open services.

Summary of Prior Agency Involvement with Family

The parents have no prior involvement as caregivers; [redacted]



10/06/2025

Central Region Child Fatality Prevention Specialist — Date
Stephanie Pena



10/3/2025

Central Region Circuit 9 Operations Manager — Date
Brittany Garcia