Child Fatality Summary

Child's Name: Sebastian Gardner

County: Volusia

Date of Birth: 12/16/2023

Date of Death: 06/06/2025

Report Number: 2025-198464

Family Composition Chart

Name	Age at Time of Incident	Relationship with Deceased Child
Sebastian Gardner	1.5 years old	Decedent
Scott Gardner	33 years old	Father

Circumstances Surrounding Death

On June 6, 2025, the infant was found unresponsive by the father.

That morning, the father noticed the child had an elevated temperature, around 99 degrees, and decided to keep the child home from daycare. The father notified the daycare of the child's absence, as well as his to his employer, due to staying home with the child.

The father prepared breakfast and gave the child Tylenol to assist with his fever. The two left the home shortly afterward to run a few errands throughout the day together.

The father reported that at one point while driving, he noted the child was unusually quiet and unresponsive. He attempted to awaken the child by slapping him in the face, until he was able to pull his vehicle over to assess the child. The father indicated he believed the child "choked on a yogurt ball." The father reports he stopped his truck and saw that the child was not breathing and attempted a rescue breath, when the child's eyes popped open. The father then dialed 911 and drove to the home of the paternal grandmother. When he arrived at the home of the paternal grandmother, the father ran in yelling requesting assistance to which the grandmother and her paramour began CPR. The father reported that when law enforcement arrived, no one could get the child's mouth open to complete CPR.

When EMS arrived, the child was lying supine on the couch, unresponsive. EMS noted the child's appearance to have been indicative of being exposed to extreme heat for a prolonged period. The child had rigor mortis in his jaw and all extremities. The child was unable to be intubated during transport to the hospital as his jaw was extremely stiff.

Upon arrival to Advent Health Daytona Beach – Pediatric ER, lifesaving efforts were continued. The child's temperature upon arrival was 107.8 degrees. A nurse indicated that the body typically cools down about 3-4 degrees an hour, meaning when law enforcement initially arrived in response to the 911 call, the child's body was likely closer to 111 degrees.

Despite lifesaving measures, the child was pronounced deceased at 3:30 p.m.

The father submitted a urinalysis to a which was positive for THC and alcohol.

Ormond Beach Police Department and the Volusia County Sheriff's Office became involved in the investigation of the child's death.

Throughout the investigation, detectives discovered that the information provided by the father appeared to be inconsistent and it was discovered the father took additional trips during the day that he did not disclose to law enforcement. Additionally, the condition of the child indicated he had died much earlier than when the 911 call was made by the father.

It was learned on June 6, 2025, that the father arrived at a local barbershop to receive a haircut around 11:30 a.m. and finished by 12 p.m. Based on witness accounts, the child was not present with the father during the haircut.

Further investigation indicated that the father went to a local bar in the same area once his haircut was finished and again, the child was not present. The father arrived at the bar shortly after his haircut and was present for several hours, consuming two beers and two shots of *Fireball Whiskey*. The father even informed bartenders inside that his son had a fever that day. The father left the bar around 2:40 p.m. and the 911 call was made around 2:45 p.m.

Upon additional interviews with law enforcement, the father admitted to leaving the child in the vehicle, which was turned off, but advised the windows were down. The father advised there was a battery-operated fan turned in the child's direction inside the vehicle.

Overwhelming evidence supports the child being left inside the father's vehicle, in the Florida heat, approximately 90 degrees. During that time, there is no evidence to support the father checked on the child. The child's clothes were soaking wet from sweat and the child's condition was consistent with being left unattended in a hot vehicle. The child's joints were stiff and consistent with dying while being in a seated position.

The father was arrested on charges related to the child's death on June 19, 2025.

The State Attorney's Office is pursuing charges against the father for First Degree Felony Murder, Aggravated Child Abuse, and Neglect of a Child causing Great Bodily Harm, Permanent Disability or Permanent Disfigurement. The father's criminal case is ongoing at this time.

The death certificate was received and indicated Medical Examiner, Mary Geletta Ripple (ME#143525), signed and certified the death certificate for the child on June 11, 2025.

Cause of Death: Hyperthermia

Manner of Death: Homicide

On June 16, 2026, the Department of Children and Families' investigation was closed with verified findings of Death, Inadequate Supervision, and Substance Misuse – Alcohol. The child died as a result of the father's negligence, leaving him in a vehicle unattended, while the father received a haircut and consumed alcohol at a local bar.

Other Children in the Home

There are no surviving children in the home. The half siblings of the child were seen in their home and determined to be safe.

Summary of Current Agency Involvement with Family

There have been no referrals made for the father at this time, and he remains incarcerated at the Volusia County jail awaiting trial on no bond.

Summary of Prior Agency Involvement with Family

The family has prior history with the Department, including multiple investigations. [redacted] Shortly after the birth of the decedent, an additional report was made indicating the mother was consuming alcohol while breastfeeding and exhibiting significant mental health concerns, [redacted]. She was also reported to be using prescription medication [redacted] in combination with heavy alcohol use. This report was verified, and the family was referred to in-home, non-judicial services. Safety plans were implemented, with the father serving as the safety monitor for the decedent and the other father serving as the safety monitor for the two older children.

[redacted].

Taylor Hayes *06/23/2026*

Taylor Hayes ***Date***
NER Child Fatality Prevention Specialist

Racquel Courts *6/24/2026*

Racquel Courts ***Date***
NER Program Manager