Child Fatality Summary

Child's Name: Kenneth Westervelt

County: Marion

Date of Birth: 02/09/2024

Date of Death: 08/16/2024

Report Number: 2024-266088

Family Composition Chart

Name	Age at Time of the Incident	Relationship with Deceased Child
Kenneth Westervelt	6 months old	Child Victim
[redacted]	2 years old	Sibling
[redacted]	6 years old	Sibling
Stephanie Johnson	34 years old	Mother
James Westervelt	36 years old	Father
Christopher Smith	37 years old	Roommate/Possible Bio Father of Kenneth

Circumstances Surrounding Death

On August 12, 2024, the 6-month-old infant was found with his eyes rolled back, unresponsive and limp in his bassinet subsequently passing away on August 16, 2024.

According to the family, the following information was provided, the infant was observed to be well during the days leading to the incident. He was cared for at home by both parents. On August 11, the mother had been playing with the infant before putting him and his siblings to bed for the night.

At approximately 3am on August 12th, the mother woke up to feed the infant, placed him back to sleep in his basinet and left the home. She returned home right before it was time to have the 6-year-old sibling ready for school. She checked on the infant who was sleeping in his bassinet and began making breakfast. The father helped the sibling get ready and walked her to the bus stop. Soon after the father's return, the mother went to check on the infant and found him with his eyes wide open but limp and unresponsive. She called 911. The infant was initially thought to be experiencing seizures. EMS transported him to Advent Health in Ocala, and then airlifted to Advent Health for Children in Orlando, FL.

Advent Health medical records revealed the infant had suffered from non-accidental trauma. His diagnosis included diffusion in the cerebral cortex, basal ganglia, and cerebellum with diffuse swelling and effacement of the subarachnoid spaces consistent with severe cytotoxic brain injury and cerebellar edema. He had retinal hemorrhage and detached retina, which was consistent with Abusive Head Trauma.

On August 16, 2024, the child was pronounced deceased at 2:05 a.m.

During follow up interviews with LE, the mother disclosed knowing about other incidents where the infant was injured while being cared for by the father of the children, like hitting the infant's head with a wood propped beside the bathroom door causing a bruise during the days leading to incident; however, the father would explain all injuries away as accidental. Further, the mother confirmed a previous incident of Domestic Violence where the father was arrested and incarcerated. During that time, the mother and the roommate were together and she believed the infant was the roommate's biological son. The mother felt like the father treated the infant differently because he knew the infant was not his biological son.

During follow up interviews with LE, the father confirmed the mother's timeline adding that while she was away, he went to use the bathroom leaving the children unattended. Once back, he found the 2-year-old sibling inside the infant's bassinet tapping him on the head. He removed the sibling, which made both children cry. He picked up the infant and "bounced" him to calm him down. Once confronted with his explanation not matching the infant's injuries, the father stated that on August 8th he placed the infant on his bed and walked away to make a bottle. He then heard crying and found the infant had fallen off the bed. He picked him up and was able to calm him by bouncing him and feeding him, adding the infant threw up multiple times during the following days.

On August 18, 2024, LE was alerted to a video where the infant is observed lying on a pillow with the father using a leaf blower over his body, primarily to the infant's face. The infant was observed flailing his arms and gasping for air due to the wind stream caused by the blower. On August 26, 2024, extractions were completed from several devices confiscated at the beginning of the investigation.

During 2025 and early 2026, LE continued to work with the ME's office as well as experts from the Jacksonville Advocacy Center.

On April 29, 2026, a warrant for the father's arrest charging him with Child Abuse without Great Bodily Harm was signed by a judge. On May 5, the father was arrested.

The Marion County Sheriff's Office investigated the death of the child (24OFF017420). On May 5, 2026, following the father's arrest for Child Abuse without Great Bodily harm, a follow up interview was completed. During the interview, the father admitted he was annoyed that the mother left to go to a friend's home early in the morning on August 12th. He admitted to using methamphetamine twice that night and was up until around 4:30 am. The infant woke up fussy at around 5:30 am and woke up the 2-year-old sibling who was in bed with the father. He fed the infant and put him back to sleep. When asked about the infant being shaken, the father stated it could maybe be from him bouncing the infant in his bassinet. He admitted it could have been harder than he intended due to him being high on Methamphetamine and demonstrated with a fake baby doll how he had shaken the infant until his crying slowed down. He also admitted that he was "freaking out" because the infant was crying a lot then made a weird breathing noise, which the father

described as when someone “miss one of their breaths”, and shut his eyes. The father also spoke about previous incidents of abuse. On June 8, 2026, the father’s charges were upgraded to Murder in the second degree.

The autopsy report was received on July 7, 2026, and indicated District 5 Medical Examiner Barbara C. Wolf, M.D., completed an autopsy of the child on April 2, 2024. ME# 24-05-1963.

The death certificate was received on January 1, 2025, and indicated District 5 Medical Examiner Barbara C. Wolf, M.D., signed and certified the death certificate for the child on December 14, 2024. ME# 24-05-1963.

AUTOPSY FINDINGS:
1. Sub-periosteal hematoma over right frontal bone
2. Histology examination: normal
3. Toxicology: negative

Cause of Death: Hypoxic/Ischemic Encephalopathy Blunt Head Trauma

Manner of Death: Homicide

On July 21, 2026, the Department of Children and Families’ investigation was closed with:

- Verified findings of Death, Physical Injury, Internal Injuries, Inadequate Supervision and Substance Misuse Illicit drugs as to the infant with the legal father, James Westervelt as the caregiver responsible.
- Verified findings of Inadequate Supervision and Failure to Protect as to the infant with the mother, Stephanie Johnson, as the caregiver responsible.
- Verified findings of Failure to Protect as to the infant with the roommate/ biological father, Christopher Smith, as caregiver responsible.
- [redacted].

Other Children in the Family:

The siblings were deemed unsafe and sheltered from their parents.

Summary of Current Agency Involvement with Family:

Once the siblings were sheltered, out-of-home judicial services were put in place for the family.

Summary of Prior Agency Involvement with Family:

The family was involved in two investigations in 2018 and 2022 [redacted].

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

Central Region Child Fatality Prevention Specialist — 07/23/2026
Stephanie Pena — Date

Erica Nurse — 07/23/2026
Central Region C5 Operations Manager — Date
Erica Nurse