



**A Review of Department of Family and Protective Services Involvement
Child Fatality**

On March 13, 2016, during an open Child Protective Services (CPS) case, Leiliana Wright died due to inflicted blunt force trauma. Her mother and mother's boyfriend were arrested for causing the injuries that led to her death. Leiliana was four years old. CPS was involved with Leiliana's family at that time due to an investigation regarding concerns reported on January 4, 2016. The family also had previous involvement with CPS, including prior investigations and a Family Based Safety Services case.

The Office of Child Safety (OCS) completed a review of the current and past CPS involvement concerning Leiliana's family. This report presents the Office of Child Safety's findings, summary of CPS investigations and actions taken, assessment of strengths in casework practice, and areas for improvement.

Family Composition

Region 3 - Dallas County

Name or Relationship to Leiliana	Age at time of incident
Leiliana Wright	4 years old
Sibling	1 year old
Mother	30 years old
Mother's boyfriend	34 years old

Summary of CPS History on Leiliana / Family of Leiliana Wright

- On October 20, 2014, CPS received a report alleging physical abuse of Leiliana's younger sibling by their mother.
- On November 9, 2014, CPS received a second report alleging neglectful supervision of Leiliana and her younger sibling by their mother. The report was merged with the previous investigation and allegations investigated with the October 2014 allegations.
 - The investigation from the previous two reports was found reason to believe and closed on January 2, 2015 then transferred to Family Based Safety Services (FBSS).
 - On February 23, 2015, during the open FBSS case, CPS received two reports alleging physical abuse of Leiliana by her mother and grandmother. The investigation was ruled out and closed on April 3, 2015.
 - The Family Based Safety Services case was closed on May 14, 2015.
- On January 4, 2016, CPS received a report alleging sexual abuse, neglectful supervision, and physical abuse of Leiliana and her younger sibling. The allegations in this investigation were found unable to determine for neglectful supervision by the mother, unable to determine physical abuse of Leiliana by the mother's boyfriend, and unable to determine

sexual abuse of Leiliana by a relative. Allegations of neglectful supervision, physical abuse and sexual abuse of the sibling were ruled out. The investigation closed on June 22, 2016.

- On March 13, 2016, CPS received the report regarding Leiliana's death. The allegations in the investigation were found reason to believe for neglectful supervision by the mother and her boyfriend of both Leiliana and her sibling. Physical abuse of Leiliana was found to be the cause of her death and both the mother and her boyfriend were confirmed perpetrators. Sexual abuse of Leiliana was also given a reason to believe finding. An allegation of physical abuse to the sibling was ruled out.

Additional Summary of CPS History on Alleged Perpetrator

Additional records involving Leiliana's mother's boyfriend documents CPS involvement with another family as well as with his own children several years preceding Leiliana's death. This includes history in New Mexico and Texas. Allegations in 2003 and 2005 were found unable to determine for neglectful supervision and physical abuse due to alleged domestic violence between Leiliana's mother's boyfriend and the mothers of his children. Records also indicate that Leiliana's mother's boyfriend had a history of heroin use, including a possible overdose that required hospitalization in 2011. His daughter was removed in 2011 by CPS and later adopted.

Detailed Account of CPS History on Family of Leiliana Wright

On **October 20, 2014**, CPS received a report regarding Leiliana's younger sibling. The report alleged physical abuse of the sibling by the mother. The report stated that the child was born six days prior and there were concerns that the mother used methamphetamines during pregnancy. The mother was not drug tested at the time of the birth. The child's urine drug screen tested negative for drugs, while the child's meconium was positive for marijuana.

The parents initially refused to cooperate with requests made by CPS, including the mother's refusal to submit to a drug test. The mother denied using drugs while pregnant. She did confirm CPS history outside of the state of Texas. CPS staff was directed to submit a request for court ordered services. Ten days later, documentation with the legal department indicates the case did not qualify for legal action.

On **November 9, 2014**, CPS received a second report regarding Leiliana and her younger sibling. The report alleged neglectful supervision by their mother. The report stated that the mother was involved in a traffic stop and found to be in possession of crystal methamphetamines. The mother was arrested. At the time of the arrest, Leiliana was in the vehicle with her mother and released to the mother's boyfriend (father to the younger sibling).

After the mother's arrest, on November 10, 2014, both children were found to be residing with and being cared for by Leiliana's younger sibling's paternal relatives. The sibling's father was reported to also reside in the home, however did not appear to have been present at the time of contact. The mother was later interviewed in jail and denied recent drug use, citing past marijuana use seven to eight months prior to knowing she was pregnant. She also confirmed a history of ecstasy and methamphetamine use four to five years prior. Documentation appears to imply that the mother denied that the methamphetamines found in the car belonged to her. The mother agreed to a parental child safety placement (PCSP) with the paternal relatives where the children were staying at the time. It appears that ongoing services were

recommended to the mother at that time of her interview. It was discovered that the father of the sibling was also incarcerated a few days after the mother's incarceration. On December 1, 2014, CPS received the mother's drug test results. She tested positive for marijuana. During the investigation, Leiliana's paternal relatives expressed concerns for Leiliana and obtained an attorney in an attempt to seek guardianship of her. A court granted the paternal relatives visits on the first and third Saturdays of the month. Prior to closure of the investigation, on December 17, 2014, CPS approved the mother's request to move the PCSP from the sibling's paternal relatives to the children's maternal relative's home. The case was then transferred to Family Based Safety Services (FBSS) for ongoing services.

The FBSS case was opened on January 2, 2015. The mother was referred to services for drug treatment and parenting classes while the children were to remain in the PCSP with the maternal grandmother and only have supervised contact with their mother. Leiliana's paternal grandparents continued visits as court ordered. Staff visited with Leiliana and her younger sibling on a monthly basis. In February 2015, staff communicated with the father of the mother's other children residing out of state. He expressed concerns regarding drug use and poor choices in men made by the mother and stated he had previously gained custody of their children. At the end of the month, on February 23, 2015, Leiliana's paternal grandmother expressed concerns that during a visit she noticed Leiliana had bruises on her face and a busted lip. In response, staff telephoned the maternal grandmother/PCSP placement. Staff spoke with the maternal grandmother about the bruises and then asked to speak with Leiliana over the phone. Leiliana made two statements during the phone conversation to staff that her mother "smacked her" face and lips. The supervisor directed the worker to make a new report so that an official investigation of the alleged physical abuse would be launched.

On **February 23, 2015**, CPS received two priority one reports regarding Leiliana. The reports alleged physical abuse by the mother and maternal grandmother. The reports stated that Leiliana was observed with bruising to her face and that Leiliana stated that her mother smacked her. Photos of the observed injuries were reported to have been provided to CPS staff.

Investigative staff made contact with Leiliana and her sibling the following day. Leiliana told staff that her mother "smacked" her. Leiliana imitated a slapping motion. The grandmother denied injuries were due to physical abuse. Leiliana's mother was interviewed on March 31, 2015. The mother denied that the bruising was due to physical abuse. Both mother and maternal grandmother stated that Leiliana was very clumsy and always running into things. They stated Leiliana had bruising from running into a wall. Leiliana was again interviewed on this date and stated to staff that she ran into the wall and hit her face. The investigation was closed on April 3, 2015 and ruled out.

Staff continued to remain involved with the family during the FBSS case. In March 2015, staff verified that the mother completed drug treatment services. The worker then lifted the supervision requirement in April 2015. Also at the end of March, staff requested that a special investigator search for the sibling's father. Special investigations staff spoke with him and requested that he contact the primary FBSS caseworker. Contact was never made. The FBSS case was closed on May 14, 2015.

OCS Assessment:

- Staff did not attempt to engage the sibling's father during the investigation. Only one contact with him is documented at the start of the case, in which he attempted to contact CPS staff by telephone.
- Staff did not speak with the biological father of Leiliana during the first investigation until December 17, 2014. Staff did not attempt contact with him during the second investigation. Per CPS Policy 2241 Interviews With Children: if the parents do not know the child has been contacted, the caseworker must make reasonable efforts to notify each parent about the contact and nature of the allegations within 24 hours of the contact, unless notification would endanger any child in the home, a reporter, or anyone else who participated in the investigation.
- Although staff made contact with the children earlier in the investigation, staff did not attempt to conduct an interview of Leiliana during the first investigation (who was two months shy of her third birthday at the time of the second report was received) until December 12, 2014.
- Although staff was directed to obtain out of state history on the family, there is no documentation to support this was completed.
- The mother tested positive for marijuana on a drug test. The results were not discussed by staff with the mother.
- Safe sleep was not discussed with the family during the first investigation.
- CPS approved the children to be placed in a paternal child safety placement (PCSP) with the maternal grandmother prior to completing tasks necessary for approval. Staff never interviewed the maternal grandfather in the home, who also lived in the home, nor did staff contact a collateral reference for the maternal grandmother prior to approval or within 24 hours of completing the placement. Per CPS Policy 3211.6 Collateral Contacts: The caseworker must make collateral contacts to confirm that the PCSP is safe before the child goes into the PCSP or, if that is not possible, within 24 hours after the child goes into the PCSP.
- During the investigation, the mother disclosed concerns of possible sexual abuse of Leiliana by a family member to staff. Staff did not explore the mother's concerns.
- The biological father of Leiliana stated he experienced physical and emotional abuse as a child by his stepfather. This was not explored and it is uncertain if the stepfather is the paternal grandfather involved in the case, or a different individual.
- It is unknown why there was a delay in investigation closure and transfer to Family Based Safety Services. The case was identified as appropriate for services on November 10, 2014, yet not transferred to FBSS until January 2, 2015.
- Throughout the FBSS case, staff visited with the children in the home of the PCSP and the mother was always present. It is unknown if the mother was truly living outside of the home as directed by staff.
- There were minimal attempts to locate Leiliana's younger sibling's father.
- Staff spoke with Leiliana's father once during the four month FBSS case. Per CPS Policy 2510 General Provisions Reasonable Effort to Engage Parents: The caseworker must make reasonable efforts to engage both parents of each child who will be receiving family preservation services.
- Staff never spoke with the maternal grandfather, who reportedly lived in the PCSP home, during the FBSS case.

- It is unclear in the documentation exactly what services the mother completed, and whether both drug treatment and parenting classes were completed.
- It appears the mother was drug tested through either her service provider or probation services, however results of drug tests were not clearly documented. CPS did not drug test any parent during the FBSS case.
- Staff made one attempt to contact the mother's probation officer regarding her status throughout the FBSS case and never spoke with the probation officer.
- After staff was made aware of the concerns regarding bruising to Leiliana's face, staff did not respond to the home. Staff contacted Leiliana via telephone to address the concerns.
- During the February investigation regarding bruising to Leiliana's face, staff did not contact reporters to obtain more information regarding the concerns.
- Staff did not arrange for a joint investigation regarding the bruising to Leiliana's face. Per CPS Policy 2230 Investigation Tasks: Arrange for joint investigation with law enforcement if Priority 1 (P1) and sexual abuse (SXAB) or physical abuse (PHAB) is alleged, or document why a joint investigation cannot occur.
- Staff did not attempt contact with either child's biological father during the February 2015 investigation.
- Staff did not speak with the mother until a month after the injuries were observed.
- Staff appear to have interviewed the mother and maternal grandmother together on March 31, 2015. Best practice is to conduct interviews separately.
- Although Leiliana repeatedly informed both FBSS and investigative staff that her mother smacked her on the face, staff did not recommend a change in case direction such as legal involvement, a change in PCSP, or a change in the mother's contact or service needs.
- Staff heavily relied on Leiliana's statement made on March 31, 2015, which significantly differed from Leiliana's original statements made shortly after the bruising was observed.
- The investigation was given a disposition of ruled out even though Leiliana made statements that her mother "smacked" her and the bruising was observed by staff.
- There are photographs of bruising to Leiliana that have been uploaded into the case, but not properly labeled. It appears that the photographs uploaded were provided by family members, as one has been observed in a media article. It does not appear that staff uploaded photographs that they took of the observed injuries to Leiliana, even though documentation indicates pictures were taken of the bruises on February 24, 2015.
- Many family members were involved and invested in Leiliana's and her sibling's safety and wellbeing. The case would have benefited from a Family Group Decision Making meeting or a safety network meeting to gather family supports and strengthen the safety of the children.

On **January 4, 2016**, CPS received a priority two report regarding physical and sexual abuse of Leiliana and her younger sibling. The report also alleged neglectful supervision by the children's mother. The report stated that the father of Leiliana's sibling was arrested for aggravated sexual assault to a former girlfriend's daughter. There was concern of possible sexual abuse to Leiliana and her sibling after his arrest, as well as reports of domestic violence concerns between Leiliana's mother and the father.

Staff attempted to meet with the family on January 8, 2016. An appointment was scheduled by telephone for January 11, 2016. Prior to the meeting, the mother stated she would have to reschedule due to a doctor's appointment. Staff made another attempt at the home two days later. On January 26, 2016, a special investigator was assigned to make contact with the family.

On February 9, 2016, the special investigator made contact with the mother and children. The mother denied that her children had been sexually abused by Leiliana's sibling's father, but admitted to being present at the time he was arrested for the aggravated sexual assault. She admitted that her children have been present in the past when he assaulted her. Leiliana was observed on this date by staff to have an old bruise, purple in color, under her left eye and another bruise, yellow in color, on the right of her right eye. She was also observed with a yellow bruise on her right hand. Photos were taken by staff. The mother attributed one bruise to an injury that occurred a year prior when Leiliana ran into the corner of a table, which she stated remained the same color since. She stated that the other bruise was from Leiliana having a temper tantrum and falling on the floor four to five days prior. The bruise on her hand was attributed to the mother's friend (later determined to be the boyfriend arrested for Leiliana's death) who spanked Leiliana's hand while he was watching her. Leiliana was interviewed and stated that her mother's friend spanked her on her hand and gave her the bruise. Leiliana was not able to remember how the other bruises occurred. She was also questioned regarding sexual abuse and made an outcry against a family member. The special investigator advised the mother to not allow any contact between both the family member alleged to have sexually abused Leiliana and the friend who bruised Leiliana's hand. The mother agreed.

The same day, the special investigator attempted to make contact with the primary investigator assigned to the case. Contact was ultimately made the following day, February 10th. The primary investigator was advised that there were concerns noted from the visit. On February 11, 2016, the primary investigator's supervisor requested that special investigator prepare an affidavit of fact. The affidavit was completed on February 17, 2016, and primary investigator's supervisor advised there was a high probability of removal of the children. (It should be noted this information and subsequent details were entered by field staff after Leiliana's death was reported to CPS on March 13, 2016.)

According to documentation, after being notified of concerns to Leiliana (specific dates unknown), the primary investigator's supervisor contacted the mother and advised that Leiliana needed to have a medical consult. The mother agreed.

Medical consult documentation indicates that Leiliana was observed on the morning of February 12, 2016, by medical professionals. The medical assessment documented "Leiliana is a 4 year old girl presenting with history concerning for sexual abuse. Her genital examination is normal. A normal genital exam does not rule out sexual contact. On examination, she was identified to have multiple areas of bruising - face, back, buttock, outer thigh. The pattern and location of the bruising is not consistent with accidental falls. The injury distribution and appearance is most consistent with inflicted injuries. Laboratory evaluation identified normal clotting studies and blood counts. At this time I am most concerned about physical abuse given the bruising." In addition, the documentation indicates that medical staff spoke with CPS staff and an affidavit was requested at some point after the medical assessment was received. The medical consult was uploaded onto the Forensic Assessment Center Network database on February 12, 2016.

The affidavit, written on March 2, 2016, and uploaded onto the database on the same date, states "The injuries represent multiple episodes of trauma. It is not plausible the eye injury has been present for one year. The examination findings are most consistent with physical abuse. The concerns of sexual abuse need to be further investigated."

Documentation further indicates that CPS staff attempted contact with the family at the home on March 2nd and March 4th. An appointment was set with the mother for March 7, 2016. Staff attempted to meet with the family for the appointment on March 7, 2016, at the family home, however there was no response.

OCS Assessment:

- Staff did not attempt to make contact with the family within proper initial time frames. Per CPS Policy 2241 Interviews With Children: Priority 2 reports that do not go through the screening process must have all alleged victims interviewed, or attempted to be interviewed, within 72 hours of intake date and time.
- Staff did not follow policy regarding follow up when contact is not initially made with a child and family. CPS Policy 2241 Interviews with Children: The caseworker must interview each alleged victim face-to-face (as appropriate for the victim's age and development) within the prescribed time frames. If the caseworker cannot contact alleged victims within prescribed time frames, the caseworker must immediately develop and implement a follow up plan, with the supervisor's approval.
- Although the special investigator appropriately identified concerns at the first visit with the family, staff did not ensure the children's safety on that date. A safety plan was not put into place, a parental child safety placement (PCSP) was not explored, and legal intervention was not discussed.
- It is uncertain if staff reviewed CPS history, as this was the second case in which Leiliana was observed with bruising to her face and unlikely explanations provided.
- The mother has a history of substance abuse. Staff did not request a drug test.
- Attempts to contact the biological fathers were not made.
- Attempts to contact the friend of the mother who Leiliana stated spanked her hand were not made.
- Attempts to contact the family member who Leiliana made sexual abuse outcries against were not attempted.
- CPS history outside of Texas was not obtained.
- Staff did not set up a forensic interview for Leiliana based on the concerning statements regarding physical and sexual abuse made during her interview.
- Staff did not contact law enforcement after Leiliana made concerning statements alleged physical or sexual abuse.

On **March 13, 2016**, CPS received a report regarding Leiliana's death. Leiliana's mother and mother's boyfriend were arrested for her death. Leiliana's younger sibling was placed in DFPS conservatorship after her death.

Overall Case Review Findings and Recommendations

Child Protective Services (CPS) was involved in an open investigation at the time of Leiliana's death. At the time, CPS was involved due to concerns of neglectful supervision, sexual abuse, and physical abuse. Although CPS staff were aware of serious concerns, had made contact with Leiliana and physical injuries were present, and recommended a medical evaluation to gather further information, safety measures were not put in place to protect Leiliana and her sibling from the person most responsible for the children's safety, their mother, and the mother's boyfriend. The investigation open at the time of her death was the second time in which Leiliana had been observed by CPS staff with bruising to her face. It was later discovered that both the mother and mother's boyfriend were under the influence of heroin at the time of Leiliana's traumatic last day of life. Staff had not assessed substance abuse by the mother, did not drug test her during the investigation, nor did they make contact with the boyfriend who had reportedly caused bruising to Leiliana about a month prior to her death. The myriad of issues found in the case at critical key moments are concerning and demonstrate a lack of action and oversight which directly impacted Leiliana's fate.

During the review of a child fatality, certain areas of improvement may be identified including individual training needs, statewide trainings, policy revisions, updates to best practice guidance, and/or revisions to state statutes.

CPS and OCS have partnered to provide in-depth training statewide to address investigation practices surrounding physical abuse and sexual abuse allegations. These trainings involved partners in the community and subject matter experts, such as local child advocacy centers, the Forensic Assessment Center Network, and local child abuse pediatricians. This training included assessing, identifying and putting safety measures in place to ensure child safety. It also included information about partnering with law enforcement, medical experts, and collateral contacts to have a thorough investigation and support decision making and supervision in these investigations. Additional training has also been provided to CPS Family Based Safety Services to enhance their practices around assessment, engagement, and addressing child safety through critical case analysis and case mapping.

Additionally, CPS worked with staff to:

- Review expectations of staff when attempts to locate a child are initially unsuccessful.
- Review special investigator duties to ensure all are aware that tasks concerning safety of children are not solely the responsibility of the primary staff assigned to the case, but also to any DFPS employee tasked with a case duty.
- Review the importance of reviewing and obtaining CPS and criminal history prior to making contact with families in order to make well-informed safety decisions.
- Review the importance of engaging biological fathers.
- Review the importance of engaging extended family and supports in all cases to assist in child safety. Family group conferencing and safety network meetings should be considered once staff have identified extended family or community supports that are capable of identifying family concerns, strengths, and goals to develop a plan for ongoing child safety.