



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

**REPORT ON THE FATALITY OF:**

**Jeffrey Watkins**

**Date of Birth: 09/16/2013**

**Date of Death: 11/16/2013**

**Date of Oral Report: 11/16/2013**

**FAMILY NOT KNOWN TO:**

**Mercer County Children and Youth Services**

**REPORT FINALIZED ON:**

**June 24, 2015**

Unredacted reports are confidential under the provisions of the Child Protective Services Law and cannot be released to the public.

(23 Pa. C.S. Section 6340)

Unauthorized release is prohibited under penalty of law.

(23 Pa. C.S. 6349 (b))

**Reason for Review:**

Senate Bill 1147, Printer's Number 2159 was signed into law on July 3, 2008. The bill became effective on December 30, 2008 and is known as Act 33 of 2008. As part of Act 33 of 2008, DHS must conduct a review and provide a written report of all cases of suspected child abuse that result in a child fatality or near fatality. This written report must be completed as soon as possible but no later than six months after the date the report was registered with ChildLine for investigation.

Act 33 of 2008 also requires that county children and youth agencies convene a review when a report of child abuse involving a child fatality or near fatality is indicated or when a status determination has not been made regarding the report within 30 days of the oral report to ChildLine. Mercer County has not convened a review team in accordance with Act 33 of 2008 related to this report [REDACTED]

**Family Constellation:**

<u>Name:</u>	<u>Relationship:</u>	<u>Date of Birth:</u>
Jeffrey Watkins	victim child	09/16/2013
[REDACTED]	mother	[REDACTED] 1984
* [REDACTED]	father	[REDACTED] 1975
[REDACTED]	half-sibling	[REDACTED] 2011
[REDACTED]	maternal grandmother	unknown
[REDACTED]	maternal uncle	[REDACTED] 1987
[REDACTED]	maternal uncle	[REDACTED] 1989

\*designates not a household member at the time of the child's death.

**Notification of Child Fatality:**

On 11/16/13, Mercer County Children and Youth Services generated [REDACTED] report which stated that the mother put the child to bed the previous night around 11pm. The child sleeps in the same bedroom as the mother and when she awoke at 8am, the child was not breathing. It was believed that the approximate time of death was between 3-8am. The child reportedly had 2 bruises on the buttocks that appeared to be old (unknown time-frame); 2 red marks on his abdomen (above and below the belly button); blood on his nose with blood and vomit on his blanket. It was not known if the child was face up or face down when found deceased in the morning. An autopsy will be performed by the Erie County Coroner's Office. [REDACTED]

**Summary of DPW Child Fatality Review Activities:**

The Western Region Office of Children, Youth and Families obtained and reviewed all case records pertaining to this report [REDACTED], including dictation, safety assessment, risk assessment, certificate of death and the autopsy report. A follow-up interview was conducted with the caseworker assigned from Mercer County Children and Youth Services. The

agency did not have an internal fatality review team meeting regarding this report, [REDACTED] as the Mercer County coroner determined that the cause of death was either SIDS or pneumonia

**Children and Youth Involvement prior to Incident:**

There had been a [REDACTED] report generated on 9/17/13 stating that the mother tested positive for marijuana at the time of Jeffrey's birth. The agency accepted the case for assessment and determined that there were no safety threats or risk to the child as the mother was meeting the child's needs with the support of the maternal grandmother, who also resided in the home. The case was closed on 10/11/13.

**Circumstances of Child (Near) Fatality and Related Case Activity:**

On 11/16/13, Mercer County Children and Youth Services on-call worker received a call from the [REDACTED] Police Department stating that there was an infant fatality regarding the victim child who was pronounced dead at the scene of the mother's home. The police were requesting information as to any previous history with this family which the agency provided. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the caseworker spoke to the mother and maternal grandmother.

The mother reported that Jeffrey had been born 3 weeks premature, and that he has had a history of coughing, sneezing, respiratory issues and acid reflux since birth. He had last been seen by the pediatrician on 11/08/13 for the above issues. The mother provided specific details regarding her activities with the child the previous day. She reported that she woke up around 8:00am on 11/16/13 and when she picked Jeffrey up she knew something was wrong. She then contacted 911 as she realized he was deceased. The caseworker explained that he needed to obtain more information [REDACTED] before a decision was made regarding the need for a safety plan for [REDACTED], the sibling. Several other relatives were also at the home to be with the mother during this period of time as she was extremely distraught.

[REDACTED] The caseworker was informed that the Erie County Coroner would complete the autopsy. The caseworker obtained photocopies of the injuries, which noted bruising on the abdomen by the diaper; there was also a bright red mark on the stomach above the belly button approximately the size of a .50 cent piece, and another red mark the size of a quarter on the lower abdomen, just below the belly button. There were 2 additional bruises noted on the right side of the child's buttocks that were dark blue in color, approximately 1-2 inches in length. At the time of the coroner's arrival to the home, the child's core temperature was 85. The caseworker spoke directly to the coroner who at the time stated that he could not yet determine the cause of death, but the death was most likely SIDS, but that homicide was not ruled out at this time.

Given the circumstances, Mercer County Children and Youth Services [REDACTED] and after completing a home evaluation and clearance checks, he was placed with his maternal great-grandmother on 11/16/13. [REDACTED]

On 11/17/13, Mercer County Children and Youth Services received a call from the [REDACTED] Police Department stating that the coroner ruled the cause of death to be either SIDS or pneumonia. They contacted the coroner who stated that the marks on the child's buttocks were Mongolian marks and that the red spots had dissipated. The coroner confirmed the above information regarding the cause of death.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

On 12/06/13, a referral was made to preventative after-care to assist the mother in setting up services and making referrals [REDACTED]. The case was closed on 1/15/14 as there were no identified safety threats regarding the 2 year old, and the mother [REDACTED]. The coroner completed the autopsy which is dated 1/21/14 with the opinion that the child died from SIDS. On 1/28/14, the certificate of death was completed and signed by the coroner listing the immediate cause of death as SIDS.

**Current Case Status:**

The case was closed on 1/15/14.

**County Strengths and Deficiencies and Recommendations for Change as Identified by the County's Child (Near) Fatality Report:**

The county agency did not convene a review team meeting as [REDACTED] was submitted within 30 days and [REDACTED] due to the child's cause of death determined to be SIDS.

**Department Review of County Internal Report:**

An internal report was not completed due to the above reasons.

**Department of Public Welfare Findings:**

**County Strengths:**

- Mercer County Children and Youth Services received the initial call from the police on 11/16/13 at 9:29am [REDACTED] By 11:00am the caseworker was at the family home.
- The dictation is very detailed regarding the information obtained [REDACTED], as well as the interviews completed with the mother and the other relatives who were at the home. The initial interviews with the mother and family were completed collaboratively between the agency and the police. After the police left the residence, the caseworker stayed to gather additional information from the family members.

- When the caseworker left the home, she went to the police department to continue the discussion regarding the injuries noted to the child; the coroner's involvement; and, to share information she obtained.
- Mercer County Children and Youth Services responded to the potential safety threats to the 2 year old sibling [REDACTED]; the agency immediately identified a relative and immediately completed the home assessment and background checks in order to place the child with kin.
- Mercer County Children and Youth Services maintained on-going contact with the police and the coroner throughout the investigation.
- Mercer County Children and Youth Services submitted [REDACTED] within 30 days.
- Mercer County Children and Youth Services referred the mother to preventative after-care to assist her in setting up [REDACTED]

County Weaknesses: No weaknesses were noted.

Statutory and Regulatory Areas of Non-Compliance: There were no areas of statutory or regulatory non-compliance.

**Department of Public Welfare Recommendations:**

Mercer County Children and Youth Services needs to continue to complete investigations that are thorough and detailed as described above.