



Report Identification Number: BU-21-015

Prepared by: New York State Office of Children & Family Services

Issue Date: Oct 25, 2021

This report, prepared pursuant to section 20(5) of the Social Services Law (SSL), concerns:

- A report made to the New York Statewide Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment (SCR) involving the death of a child.
- The death of a child for whom child protective services has an open case.
- The death of a child whose care and custody or custody and guardianship has been transferred to an authorized agency.
- The death of a child for whom the local department of social services has an open preventive service case.

The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) is mandated by section 20 of the SSL to investigate or cause for the investigation of the cause and circumstances surrounding the death, review such investigation, and prepare and issue a fatality report in regard to the categories of deaths noted above involving a child, except where a local or regional fatality review team issues a report, as authorized by law.

Such report must include: the cause of death; the identification of child protective or other services provided or actions taken regard to such child and child’s family; any extraordinary or pertinent information concerning the circumstances of the child’s death; whether the child or the child’s family received assistance, care or services from the social services district prior to the child’s death; any action or further investigation undertaken by OCFS or the social services district since the child’s death; and as appropriate, recommendations for local or state administrative or policy changes.

This report contains no information that would identify the deceased child, his or her siblings, the parent, parents, or other persons legally responsible for the child, and any members of the deceased child’s household.

By statute, this report will be forwarded to the social services district, chief county executive officer, chairperson of the local legislative body of the county where the child died and the social services district that had legal custody of the child, if different. Notice of the issuance of this report will be sent to the Speaker of the Assembly and the Temporary President of the Senate of the State of New York.

This report may **only** be disclosed to the public by OCFS pursuant to section 20(5) of the SSL. **It may be released by OCFS only after OCFS has determined that such disclosure is not contrary to the best interests of the deceased child’s siblings or other children in the household.**

OCFS’ review included an examination of actions taken by individual caseworkers and supervisors within the social services district and agencies under contract with the social services district. The observations and recommendations contained in this report reflect OCFS’ assessment and the performance of these agencies.



Abbreviations

Relationships		
BM-Biological Mother	SM-Subject Mother	SC-Subject Child
BF-Biological Father	SF-Subject Father	OC-Other Child
MGM-Maternal Grand Mother	MGF-Maternal Grand Father	FF-Foster Father
PGM-Paternal Grand Mother	PGF-Paternal Grand Father	DCP-Day Care Provider
MGGM-Maternal Great Grand Mother	MGGF-Maternal Great Grand Father	PGGF-Paternal Great Grand Father
PGGM-Paternal Great Grand Mother	MA/MU-Maternal Aunt/Maternal Uncle	PA/PU-Paternal Aunt/Paternal Uncle
FM-Foster Mother	SS-Surviving Sibling	PS-Parent Sub
CH/CHN-Child/Children	OA-Other Adult	
Contacts		
LE-Law Enforcement	CW-Case Worker	CP-Case Planner
Dr.-Doctor	ME-Medical Examiner	EMS-Emergency Medical Services
DC-Day Care	FD-Fire Department	BM-Biological Mother
CPS-Child Protective Services		
Allegations		
FX-Fractures	II-Internal Injuries	L/B/W-Lacerations/Bruises/Welts
S/D/S-Swelling/Dislocation/Sprains	C/T/S-Choking/Twisting/Shaking	B/S-Burns/Scalding
P/Nx-Poisoning/ Noxious Substance	XCP-Excessive Corporal Punishment	PD/AM-Parent's Drug Alcohol Misuse
CD/A-Child's Drug/Alcohol Use	LMC-Lack of Medical Care	EdN-Educational Neglect
EN-Emotional Neglect	SA-Sexual Abuse	M/FTTH-Malnutrition/Failure-to-thrive
IF/C/S-Inadequate Food/ Clothing/ Shelter	IG-Inadequate Guardianship	LS-Lack of Supervision
Ab-Abandonment	OTH/COI-Other	
Miscellaneous		
IND-Indicated	UNF-Unfounded	SO-Sexual Offender
Sub-Substantiated	Unsub-Unsubstantiated	DV-Domestic Violence
LDSS-Local Department of Social Service	ACS-Administration for Children's Services	NYPD-New York City Police Department
PPRS-Purchased Preventive Rehabilitative Services	TANF-Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	FC-Foster Care
MH-Mental Health	ER-Emergency Room	COS-Court Ordered Services
OP-Order of Protection	RAP-Risk Assessment Profile	FASP-Family Assessment Plan
FAR-Family Assessment Response	Hx-History	Tx-Treatment
CAC-Child Advocacy Center	PIP-Program Improvement Plan	yo- year(s) old
CPR-Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation	ASTO-Allowing Sex Abuse to Occur	



Case Information

Report Type: Child Deceased
Age: 17 year(s)

Jurisdiction: Erie
Gender: Female

Date of Death: 05/05/2021
Initial Date OCFS Notified: 05/08/2021

Presenting Information

On 5/8/21, an SCR report was received that alleged the 17-year-old female subject child died by suicide. The child appeared more depressed than usual during the past two weeks and was distraught over ongoing, demeaning text messages that her mother was sending her. The mother had been sending demeaning texts to the child for a period of about 6-9 months. The mother's pattern of behavior had a harmful effect on the emotional health and wellbeing of the subject child and contributed to her death.

Executive Summary

On 5/8/21, Erie County Department of Social Services (ECDSS) received an SCR report regarding the death of the 17-year-old female subject child that occurred on 5/5/21. The child resided with her mother, father and 14-year-old sibling. The report alleged that the mother had sent the child ongoing, demeaning text messages which had a harmful effect on the emotional health and wellbeing of the child and contributed to her death. The sibling was determined to be safe in the care of the mother and father.

Through a joint investigation with law enforcement, it was learned that the child was diagnosed with major depressive disorder and moderate social phobia and had been in mental health treatment for approximately six years. The child continued to struggle with her mental health on a regular basis. On 5/5/21, the mother was at work and the child was home with the father and sibling. The father left the home to take the sibling to his sports game. The mother returned home from work and found the child hanging from the banister of the staircase. The mother cut the child down and called 911. First responders arrived and attempted to revive the child without success. The Medical Examiner transported the child's body from the home and declared the approximate time of death as 6:00PM.

ECDSS gathered information from the medical examiner's office and law enforcement. An autopsy was performed and the final results were pending at the time the CPS investigation was closed. The preliminary results were death from suicide by child throwing herself over a railing while home alone. Law enforcement ruled the death a suicide and the criminal investigation was closed.

ECDSS found there was no credible evidence to substantiate the allegations of Inadequate Guardianship and DOA/fatality against the mother regarding the subject child. It was determined the child had been in receipt of treatment for her mental health diagnoses and at the time of her death had been compliant with her treatment and medication. ECDSS further stated the death appeared to be the result of the child's mental health struggles and not due to abuse or maltreatment by the mother. ECDSS provided information on burial assistance, referrals for grief counseling and services on behalf of the sibling. The CPS investigation was closed on 7/1/21.

Findings Related to the CPS Investigation of the Fatality

Safety Assessment:



- Was sufficient information gathered to make the decision recorded on the:
 - Approved Initial Safety Assessment? Yes
 - Safety assessment due at the time of determination? Yes
- Was the safety decision on the approved Initial Safety Assessment appropriate? Yes

Determination:

- Was sufficient information gathered to make determination(s) for all allegations as well as any others identified in the course of the investigation? Yes, sufficient information was gathered to determine all allegations.
- Was the determination made by the district to unfound or indicate appropriate? Yes

Explain:

ECDSS completed all casework objectives, made referrals for community services and closed the CPS investigation.

Was the decision to close the case appropriate? Yes

Was casework activity commensurate with appropriate and relevant statutory or regulatory requirements? Yes

Was there sufficient documentation of supervisory consultation? Yes, the case record has detail of the consultation.

Explain:

Casework activity was commensurate with case circumstances.

Required Actions Related to the Fatality

Are there Required Actions related to the compliance issue(s)? Yes No

Fatality-Related Information and Investigative Activities

Incident Information

Date of Death: 05/05/2021

Time of Death: 06:00 PM (Approximate)

Time of fatal incident, if different than time of death: Unknown

County where fatality incident occurred: Erie

Was 911 or local emergency number called? Yes

Time of Call: 09:29 PM

Did EMS respond to the scene? Yes

At time of incident leading to death, had child used alcohol or drugs? N/A

Child's activity at time of incident:



- Sleeping
- Playing
- Other

- Working
- Eating

- Driving / Vehicle occupant
- Unknown

Did child have supervision at time of incident leading to death? No - Not needed given developmental age or circumstances

Total number of deaths at incident event:

Children ages 0-18: 1

Adults: 0

Household Composition at time of Fatality

Household	Relationship	Role	Gender	Age
Deceased Child's Household	Deceased Child	Alleged Victim	Female	17 Year(s)
Deceased Child's Household	Father	No Role	Male	52 Year(s)
Deceased Child's Household	Mother	Alleged Perpetrator	Female	53 Year(s)
Deceased Child's Household	Sibling	No Role	Male	14 Year(s)

LDSS Response

ECDSS received the SCR report and within 24 hours initiated a joint investigation with law enforcement. ECDSS searched SCR history, interviewed the parents, assessed the safety of the surviving sibling, gathered information from law enforcement and the medical examiner and interviewed collaterals.

ECDSS interviewed the mother who reported the child suffered from depression and anxiety. The child was enrolled in mental health counseling and was on medication. The child had recently switched medication, which did not appear to have an effect on the child. The mother stated the child's depression had worsened leading up to her death because of school, graduation and college. The child never felt she was good enough and put a lot of pressure on herself to excel. The mother reported that the child was an above average student and did exceptionally well in school. The mother denied contributing to the child not feeling accomplished. The mother reported the child had recently missed a deadline for a scholarship and the mother conveyed disappointment, but denied she did this in a demeaning way. In addition to counseling and medication, the mother had started bringing the child to get massages and got her a dog to try to help with her depression.

The father reported he felt responsible for the child's death because he left her home alone the night of the fatality. The father stated approximately three weeks prior, the mother had requested that the child not be left alone because of her heightened depression. The day of the fatality, the father picked the child up from school and took her to get lunch. They then came home and the child went into her room. The father left the home to take the sibling to a sports game at 6:00PM. The father stated he had no inclination the child would harm herself and no concern for her behaviors, so he decided to go with the sibling and watch his sports game. The father described the child having a sadness about her, but nothing seemed different that day. The father reported the child did share text messages with him that she received from the mother. The father reported he believed the messages could have contributed to what happened to the child; however, he had never heard the mother speak in a demeaning manner toward the child and stated that they had a loving relationship.

ECDSS spoke to collateral contacts, including first responders, school staff and the child's mental health counselor. First responders reported while they were at the home, the mother had expressed feeling responsible for the child's death, as she



pressured her too much with school. There were no concerns of abuse or maltreatment reported by law enforcement, emergency medical services or school staff. The child’s mental health counselor reported the mother and child had a very close and loving relationship, and any arguments they had were typical for a mother and teen relationship. The counselor reported that the pressure of school was a source of child’s anxiety and depression, and that the missed deadline for the academic scholarship was something the child would not have handled well. The counselor further stated that the parents often bickered with each other, which the child reported caused additional stress for her.

ECDSS interviewed the sibling and he did not disclose any CPS concerns. The sibling reported being aware that his sister was depressed and had been for a while, but had no inclination she would commit suicide. He denied the child acted differently the day of her death. The sibling reported the child had a close relationship with their parents.

Official Manner and Cause of Death

Official Manner: Pending

Primary Cause of Death: Pending

Person Declaring Official Manner and Cause of Death: Medical Examiner

Multidisciplinary Investigation/Review

Was the fatality investigation conducted by a Multidisciplinary Team (MDT)? Yes

Was the fatality reviewed by an OCFS approved Child Fatality Review Team? Yes

Comments: ECDSS stated that the fatality would be referred to their OCFS approved Child Fatality Review Team.

SCR Fatality Report Summary

Alleged Victim(s)	Alleged Perpetrator(s)	Allegation(s)	Allegation Outcome
058201 - Deceased Child, Female, 17 Yrs	058202 - Mother, Female, 53 Year(s)	Emotional Neglect	Unsubstantiated
058201 - Deceased Child, Female, 17 Yrs	058202 - Mother, Female, 53 Year(s)	DOA / Fatality	Unsubstantiated
058201 - Deceased Child, Female, 17 Yrs	058202 - Mother, Female, 53 Year(s)	Inadequate Guardianship	Unsubstantiated

CPS Fatality Casework/Investigative Activities

	Yes	No	N/A	Unable to Determine
All children observed?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
When appropriate, children were interviewed?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alleged subject(s) interviewed face-to-face?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All 'other persons named' interviewed face-to-face?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Contact with source?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
All appropriate Collaterals contacted?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Was a death-scene investigation performed?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Child Fatality Report

Was there discussion with all parties (youth, other household members, and staff) who were present that day (if nonverbal, observation and comments in case notes)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Coordination of investigation with law enforcement?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Was there timely entry of progress notes and other required documentation?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Fatality Safety Assessment Activities

	Yes	No	N/A	Unable to Determine
Were there any surviving siblings or other children in the household?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Was there an adequate assessment of impending or immediate danger to surviving siblings/other children in the household named in the report:				
Within 24 hours?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At 7 days?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
At 30 days?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Was there an approved Initial Safety Assessment for all surviving siblings/ other children in the household within 24 hours?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are there any safety issues that need to be referred back to the local district?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

When safety factors were present that placed the surviving siblings/other children in the household in impending or immediate danger of serious harm, were the safety interventions, including parent/caretaker actions adequate?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Fatality Risk Assessment / Risk Assessment Profile

	Yes	No	N/A	Unable to Determine
Was the risk assessment/RAP adequate in this case?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
During the course of the investigation, was sufficient information gathered to assess risk to all surviving siblings/other children in the household?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Was there an adequate assessment of the family's need for services?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Did the protective factors in this case require the LDSS to file a petition in Family Court at any time during or after the investigation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Were appropriate/needed services offered in this case	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Placement Activities in Response to the Fatality Investigation



	Yes	No	N/A	Unable to Determine
Did the safety factors in the case show the need for the surviving siblings/other children in the household be removed or placed in foster care at any time during this fatality investigation?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Were there surviving children in the household that were removed either as a result of this fatality report / investigation or for reasons unrelated to this fatality?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Legal Activity Related to the Fatality

Was there legal activity as a result of the fatality investigation? There was no legal activity.

Services Provided to the Family in Response to the Fatality

Services	Provided After Death	Offered, but Refused	Offered, Unknown if Used	Not Offered	Needed but Unavailable	N/A	CDR Lead to Referral
Bereavement counseling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Economic support	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Funeral arrangements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Housing assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mental health services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foster care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legal services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Homemaking Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parenting Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Domestic Violence Services	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Early Intervention	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Alcohol/Substance abuse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Child Care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intensive case management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family or others as safety resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Were services provided to siblings or other children in the household to address any immediate needs and support their well-being in response to the fatality? Yes



Explain:

Grief counseling and mental health counseling was discussed with the sibling.

Were services provided to parent(s) and other care givers to address any immediate needs related to the fatality? Yes

Explain:

The parents were offered grief and mental health counseling, burial assistance, and crisis services.

History Prior to the Fatality

Child Information

Did the child have a history of alleged child abuse/maltreatment?	No
Was the child ever placed outside of the home prior to the death?	No
Were there any siblings ever placed outside of the home prior to this child's death?	No
Was the child acutely ill during the two weeks before death?	No

CPS - Investigative History Three Years Prior to the Fatality

There is no CPS investigative history in NYS within three years prior to the fatality.

CPS - Investigative History More Than Three Years Prior to the Fatality

There was no CPS investigative history more than three years prior to the fatality.

Known CPS History Outside of NYS

There was no known CPS History outside of NYS.

Legal History Within Three Years Prior to the Fatality

Was there any legal activity within three years prior to the fatality investigation? There was no legal activity

Additional Local District Comments

We at the Erie County Department of Social Services appreciate the opportunity given us to review the draft report in advance. We find that the facts, as written, accurately describe the unfortunate events and the actions taken in response. We are pleased that OCFS found that the fatality investigation was conducted appropriately and that there are no required actions related to the fatality.



Recommended Action(s)

Are there any recommended actions for local or state administrative or policy changes? Yes No

Are there any recommended prevention activities resulting from the review? Yes No