

WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
BUREAU FOR SOCIAL SERVICES

CHILD FATALITIES & NEAR FATALITIES

ANNUAL REPORT
FEDERAL FY 2025



Prepared By:
West Virginia Department of Human Services
Bureau for Social Services

DEFINITIONS

Except as set forth herein, all terms used in this report shall have the same meaning as set forth in West Virginia Code §§ 49-1-101 *et seq.*

Caretaker: Any adult who has the care, custody, or control of the child, but is not the child's parent. This includes guardians and custodians, regardless of whether there is a legal agreement or a court order granting that person formalized rights, and regardless of whether the relationship is temporary or permanent. Examples include the romantic partner of a parent, a babysitter, the psychological parent, a person who the child is residing with, or a person who is otherwise responsible for the care, supervision, and safety of the child.

Closed: A case is "closed" when: (1) the Department substantiates maltreatment, and the parents or caregivers sufficiently complete services, such that further state involvement is no longer necessary; or (2) the Department does not substantiate maltreatment following an investigation.

Collateral Sources: A person interviewed by the Department in the course of a child abuse and neglect investigation, who is not the child or the parents of the child.

CPS: Refers to Child Protective Services.

Department: Refers to the West Virginia Department of Human Services.

Emergency Ratification: A court order ratifying the Department's petition to take emergency custody of a child due to the presence of imminent danger to the physical well-being of the child, as allowed by West Virginia Code § 49-4-303.

EMS: Refers to Emergency Medical Services.

Foster Parent: An adult with whom the department has placed a child, while the child is in the custody of the state. For the purposes of this report, it may include a kinship parent, even if the kinship parent has not been certified by the department.

Institutional Investigative Unit (IIU): A specialized unit within the Department that performs advanced and complex social casework and investigations into allegations of child abuse and neglect in out-of-home care settings, such as foster care or kinship placement.

Maltreatment: A finding that a child has been abused or neglected.

Medical Examiner: Refers to the Chief Medical Examiner of West Virginia, as well as any deputy or assistant medical examiner duly employed and authorized by the West Virginia Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

Near Fatality: Any medical condition of the child which is certified by the attending physician to be life-threatening. For these purposes, "certification" is not a formal document or process.

Opened: A case is “opened” when the Department substantiates maltreatment as a result of a CPS investigation, but, prior to initiating abuse and neglect proceedings, the Department provides home-based family preservation services, consistent with West Virginia Code § 49-2-202.

Parent: The biological parent to the child. Unless otherwise stated, the “mother” means the biological mother, and the “father” means the biological father.

Petition: Refers to a petition initiating child abuse and neglect proceeding in circuit court, as permitted by West Virginia Code §§ 49-4-101 *et seq.*

Referral: Refers to a report of child abuse and neglect made to centralized intake, as set forth in West Virginia Code § 49-2-809.

Screened Out: Refers to a report of child abuse and neglect received by centralized intake that was not referred to CPS for investigation.

Services: Includes a wide range of assistance provided by the Department to parents, caretakers, and children to address or rectify a wide range of needs. Services may include, but are not limited to, adult life skills, parent education classes, healthy relationship curriculum, individualized or family counseling, abuse prevention course, anger management, drug screening, drug treatment, or supervised visitation. It may also include Birth to Three, which is a statewide system of services and supports for children under the age of three who have a delay in their development, or may be at risk of having a delay, and their family. Services may be provided as home-based family preservation services, or may be provided through a child abuse and neglect proceeding. Families may receive a single targeted service, or a combination of services.

Substantiated: A finding, beyond a preponderance of the credible evidence, that a parent or caretaker has committed maltreatment of their biological child or a child otherwise within their care, custody, or control.

Victim: Refers to the child subject to the fatality or near fatality due to child abuse or neglect.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The “Child Fatalities and Near Fatalities Annual Report” provides a comprehensive overview of each in-state child death or near death that was caused by abuse or neglect. As explained more thoroughly below, this report is a balancing act: It is intended to provide the public with pertinent information pertaining to specific incidents, but it must also must comply with statutory requirements to protect the privacy of surviving children and families.

While there are limits to what can be disclosed, it is the Department’s mission to provide the public with meaningful insight into these matters. This report does not go into every graphic detail, nor can it, but it offers an objective account of what happened. The Department aims to provide as much accurate, truthful information as it legally can. Transparency is, after all, a cornerstone to accountability.

To that end, it is important to note that for each incident, the Department promptly conducted an internal review, and, when warranted, took corrective action. Each review involved a comprehensive assessment of the circumstances and systems within the Department, and the impact they may have had on the outcome. In many instances, this resulted in policy changes, additional training, enhanced supervision, practice guidance, refined processes, or other overhauls of the system. For example, the Department is currently implementing the Action for Child Protection’s Safety Assessment and Family Evaluation (SAFE) Model which improves safety decision-making and ensures more consistent, trauma-informed practice across the state. The Department also is partnering with the Restore Hope Initiative as part of a broader prevention and family-strengthening strategy. This effort reflects a growing emphasis on upstream, community-based approaches designed to coordinate support for families before crises escalate. The purpose of any review was to learn from the incident, strengthen agency-wide practices, and improve outcomes for children and families.

PROTOCOL FOR ANNUAL REPORT

Timeframe

The annual report will cover the federal fiscal year, which begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. The annual report shall be made public no later than 12 months after the end of the reporting period.

Overview of the Contents of the Report

The report shall include the following:

1. A definitions section, similar, if not identical, to that provided herein;
2. An overview of relevant statistical information for the report incidents;
3. A comparison to statistical information for prior years, starting in FFY 2026;
4. Other preliminary information helpful to explain the parameters of the report;¹
5. An “Appendix A: Child Fatality Summaries;” and
6. An “Appendix B: Child Near Fatality Summaries.”

Information Contained in Appendix A and B

For each fatality or near fatality, the following information should be included:

1. Date of the Fatality or Near Fatality
2. Child’s Age
3. Child’s Sex
4. A synopsis of pertinent CPS history
5. The circumstances relating to the fatality or near fatality
6. The Department’s findings
7. What actions the Department took as a result of its findings

For these purposes, “pertinent CPS history” includes CPS history relating to the parents, caregivers, other children in the home, or the victims, which is relevant to the incident causing the fatality or near fatality. It does not include any CPS history occurring outside the State of West Virginia.

When reporting the actions taken, the Department will not provide any information relating to court proceedings when one or more parent is still an active party. Where the Department is aware, it will advise whether a parent or caregiver has been criminally charged in connection with the fatality or near fatality.

¹ The Department may incorporate its protocols as an appendix to each report.

Amendments

The report cannot include child fatalities or near fatalities which are not *caused* by abuse or neglect, and, as such, an incident will not be included unless causation has been reasonably established. W. Va. Code § 49-5-101(e) and 42 U.S.C.A. § 5106a(b)(2)(B)(x). The Department will not include incidents where abuse or neglect was substantiated, but where said abuse or neglect was not the cause of the fatality or near fatality. The Department will, however, find that the threshold for inclusion in this report is met when abuse or neglect is determined to be a contributing factor to the fatality or near fatality. If the nexus between the fatality or near fatality and abuse or neglect is established after the annual report is filed, then the Department will amend the annual report to incorporate the additional entries, or, in the alternative, will publish a supplement to the annual report. New information which necessitates such action may include, but is not limited to, a final autopsy report, admissions by a parent, further disclosures by a surviving child, or additional findings yielded through a criminal investigation. Reports may also be updated, at any time, to make corrections. The report will not be amended to update the status of circuit court abuse and neglect proceedings, or criminal prosecutions.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND OTHER REPORTING MECHANISMS

Confidentiality

While West Virginia Code § 49-5-101(e) provides an exemption for confidentiality in the instance of child fatalities or near fatalities, there remain limitations. First, the statute unequivocally prohibits the Department from identifying any person who reported suspected child abuse or neglect. *Id.* Second, to the extent possible, the privacy of the victims and their surviving siblings shall be protected. Prior allegations of abuse and neglect, whether substantiated or not, may disclose acts relating to surviving children which are fundamentally sensitive, such as sexual abuse or medical diagnoses. Accordingly, references to prior referrals will not be detailed, in order to maintain the identity and dignity of surviving children.

Freedom of Information Act

While state law requires the disclosure of certain information pursuant to West Virginia Code § 49-5-101(e), “[t]he West Virginia Freedom of Information Act, W. Va. Code § 29B-1-1 *et seq.* [“FOIA”] does not require the creation of public records.” Syl. Pt. 1, *Affiliated Constr. Trades Found. v. Regional Jail & Correctional Facility Auth.*, 200 W. Va. 621, 490 S.E.2d 708 (1997). The obligation under FOIA is “only to provide access to a public record already created.” *Daily Gazette Co., Inc. v. Withrow*, 177 W. Va. 110, 120 n.9, 350 S.E.2d 738, 748 n.9 (1986), *superseded by statute on other grounds as stated in Hurlbert v. Matkovich*, 233 W. Va. 583, 760 S.E.2d 152 (2014). Accordingly, the Department will disclose all information that it is required to disclose pursuant to West Virginia Code § 49-5-101(e), but it is not obligated to create a report for the specific and sole purpose of responding to a FOIA request.

Critical Incident Annual Report

It must be cautioned that the framework of the Child Fatalities and Near Fatalities Annual Report varies significantly from the Critical Incident Annual Report. Initially created in response to an audit recommendation, the Critical Incident Annual Report provides an overview of child fatalities and near fatalities, and in 2025 the Critical Incident Review Team and an annual report containing “statistical information and an epidemiological analysis,” was codified. W. Va. Code § 61-12B-5(b). Neither the historical Critical Incident Report nor the statutory report have publicly disclosed the information required for a federally compliant CAPTA report. While the Critical Incident Reports are driven by *who* the child was—*e.g.*, whether the Department had prior involvement with the child or their family—the Child Fatalities and Near Fatalities Annual Report focuses on *what happened* to the child—*e.g.*, whether the injury was caused by abuse or neglect. W. Va. Code §§ 49-5-101(e), 61-12B-3(a) and 5. The latter incorporates more detailed information, but has what, in practice, may amount to a narrower scope for inclusion. It is important that the two reports are reviewed separately.

CHILD FATALITIES & NEAR FATALITIES

Basic Demographics

- 12 child fatalities
- 11 child near fatalities

- 52% involved children under the age of 1
- 83% involved children under the age of 5

	FATALITIES	NEAR FATALITIES
SEX OF CHILD		
→ Male	8	4
→ Female	4	7
AGES OF CHILDREN		
→ Under the age of 1	5	7
→ 1 to 4 years old	3	4
→ 11 to 15 years old	4	0

Prior CPS History in West Virginia

- 83% involved families with some CPS history
- 17% involved families with 5 or more CPS referrals
- 17% involved families with no CPS history, including foster parents

- 48% involved families with a history of substantiated maltreatment
- 26% involved families that CPS previously investigated
- 17% involved families with no CPS history, or was a foster home

	FATALITIES	NEAR FATALITIES
TOTAL PRIOR REFERRALS IN WEST VIRGINIA		
→ No CPS History	1	2
→ 1 or 2	6	4
→ 3 or 4	2	3
→ 5 or more	2	2
→ Child in Department Custody	1	0
PRIOR CPS INVESTIGATIONS²		
→ Substantiated Maltreatment (multiple)	2	2
→ Substantiated Maltreatment (once)	4	3
→ Investigated Without Findings (multiple)	2	4
→ Referral Screened Out (once)	2	0
→ No CPS History	1	2
→ Child in Department Custody	1	0

² This refers to the *highest* finding(s) made by the West Virginia CPS against any parent or caregiver.

Cause of Fatality or Near Fatality

- 60% were caused by the mother, acting by herself or jointly with the father
- 39% were caused by the father, acting by himself or jointly with the mother
- 26% were caused by somebody other than the child's mother or father
- 52% were caused by drugs or alcohol, either directly or as a contributing factor

	FATALITIES	NEAR FATALITIES
PARTY PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE³		
Both Parents	3	3
Predominantly the Child's Father	1	2
Predominantly the Child's Mother	2	6
Significant Other of the Child's Parent	2	0
Guardian, Custodian, or Foster Parent	3	0
Temporary Custodian	1	0
PRIMARY CAUSE OF FATALITY/NEAR FATALITY⁴		
→ Physical Abuse/Nonaccidental Trauma	2	1
→ Drugs, Overdose	2	5
→ Drugs, Exposed at Birth	0	2
→ Drugs, Unsafe Sleeping	2	0
→ Drugs, Other	1	0
→ Lack of Supervision, Drowning	2	1
→ Lack of Supervision, Firearms	0	1
→ Neglect, Malnourishment	2	0
→ Neglect, Inappropriate Caregiver	0	1
→ Neglect, Other	1	0

³ Maltreatment may have been substantiated against another parent or caregiver for other reasons.

⁴ Focuses on the primary cause. Secondary causes or specifics are not addressed in this chart.

Appendix A: Child Fatality Summaries

Date of Death: November 8, 2024

Age: 1 month

Sex: Male

The father had previous referrals on March 3, 2021, and June 6, 2021, and through circuit court proceedings, the father's parental rights were involuntarily terminated to his child on December 16, 2021. The mother does not have prior CPS history in West Virginia. The victim died while co-sleeping in the same bed as the mother. Law enforcement reports indicate that the mother agreed that she felt drunk and that her level of intoxication may have caused her to roll over onto the victim without knowing it. Maltreatment was substantiated against the mother for neglect, due to failure or inability to supply necessary supervision or care, which led to an unsafe sleeping situation that was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the fatality. Because there were no other children in the home, the Department did not file a petition, and the case was closed on December 6, 2024.

Date of Death: November 24, 2024

Age: 3 years

Sex: Female

The family had one referral in October 2022, but it was screened out due to not meeting the legal definition of abused or neglected child. The family has no other history of child welfare involvement. On November 24, 2024, the mother reportedly asked a neighbor to keep an eye on the children, and left the home. When the mother returned at approximately 4:00 AM, she found the victim on the floor, not breathing and surrounded by vomit. The mother had left a THC edible on the counter, which was missing. It is believed the victim ingested the edible and possibly asphyxiated on her vomit. Maltreatment was found against the mother for lack of supervision and exposing the victim to a controlled substance, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the fatality, and against both parents for domestic violence. The Department obtained an emergency ratification and filed a subsequent petition. The mother voluntarily relinquished her parental rights to the surviving children, and the father's parental rights were involuntarily terminated. The surviving children remain in foster care pending permanency through adoption.

Date of Death: February 16, 2025

Age: 11 years

Sex: Female

Four referrals were made between September 2022 and January 2025, while the child was residing with the family. Each referral resulted in an investigation, and each ended with a finding that maltreatment was not substantiated. During the last investigation, there were no disclosures of abuse or neglect. At the time of the victim's death, her weight was recorded at approximately 45 pounds. Her caregivers admitted that they were aware the victim was ill but failed to seek medical treatment. Instead, the caregivers claimed that they treated the victim with over-the-counter cold and flu medicine, and administered Pedialyte during her illness. Maltreatment was substantiated against the female caregiver for physical abuse by neglecting the nutritional needs of the victim, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the fatality. Following emergency custody and the filing of a petition, the parents of the surviving child relinquished their parental rights. The caregivers and the biological father have been criminally charged with murder of a child by a parent, guardian, or custodian.

Date of Death: February 18, 2025

Age: 4 months

Sex: Male

After being born with methamphetamine, marijuana, and buprenorphine in his system, the victim was taken into Department custody. The foster family he was placed with decided to co-sleep with him, despite receiving training that it was dangerous, and despite the foster care agency buying them a crib. The baby died while co-sleeping with his foster parents on a bed and under circumstances that the Department concluded was a dangerous environment for a young infant who was already medically vulnerable. The Institutional Investigative Unit substantiated maltreatment against the foster parents, due to the unsafe sleeping arrangement, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the fatality. The home was closed from receiving future placements through the foster care system. The victim's sibling was removed from the foster home, and the removal was upheld by the Office of the Inspector General's Board of Review. The case was closed on July 18, 2025.

Date of Death: May 14, 2025

Age: 2 years

Sex: Male

The only referral, alleging that the mother tested positive for THC at the time of the victim's birth, was screened out. While the mother was not in the home, the live-in significant other left the victim alone in the tub. When the significant other returned to the bathroom, he found the victim under the water. The victim did not survive. Maltreatment was found against the mother's significant other for lack of supervision, which led to the child drowning and was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the fatality. Maltreatment was not found against the biological parents. Because there were no other children in the home, a petition was not filed, and the case was closed on October 6, 2025. The significant other was criminally charged with child neglect resulting in death.

Date of Death: May 25, 2025

Age: 1 year

Sex: Male

The family has no record of prior involvement with Child Protective Services. While alone with the victim, the father threw the victim, which resulted in blunt force trauma to his head. The initial findings of the autopsy of the victim determined that he died as a result of physical trauma. Maltreatment was found against the father for the infliction of nonaccidental trauma, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the fatality. After filing a petition, the father's parental rights were involuntarily terminated. The mother, who was a non-abusing parent, severed her relationship with the father, and the surviving child was returned to his mother's custody on July 10, 2025. The case was closed on August 19, 2025. The father was criminally charged with the victim's death, but no charges were filed against the mother.

Date of Death: June 1, 2025

Age: 4 months

Sex: Female

Between December 2004 and 2012, the Department received three referrals on the father, which resulted in his parental rights to three prior-born children being terminated. The victim died while co-sleeping with the parents on a futon twin bed. Both parents admitted to using marijuana and methamphetamines two days prior to the victim's death. Maltreatment was substantiated against the parents for neglect and for exposing the victim to drugs in the home, which led to an unsafe sleeping situation that was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the fatality. The investigation by law enforcement remains open, pending the results of the parents' drug screens and the autopsy report by the Office of the Medical Examiner. Because there were no other children in the home, the Department did not file a petition, and the case was closed on August 26, 2025.

Date of Death: June 23, 2025

Age: 1 month

Sex: Male

In 2020, the father was adjudicated as an abusive or neglectful psychological parent to two non-biological children, and he relinquished his parental rights. In 2021 and 2022 there were two other referrals made against the father which were not substantiated; in 2024 and 2025 there were three referrals against the mother which were not substantiated; and in 2024 there was one referral made against both parents which were not substantiated. At the time of the death, the parents were the kinship placement to a child in the Department's custody, although the family's home study was

denied in February 2025. The victim died during his sleep, after a prolonged period of neither parent checking on his well-being. As observed during the autopsy, the child was found to be severely malnourished and dehydrated. Maltreatment was substantiated against both parents for neglect, including malnourishment and medical neglect, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the fatality. Emergency custody was obtained and an abuse and neglect petition was filed, and the circuit court proceedings remain on-going.

Date of Death: June 30, 2025

Age: 13 years

Sex: Female

The victim and her family were residents of another state, and the fatality occurred while the victim was visiting relatives in West Virginia. The male temporary caregivers had one prior referral in 2025, which was not substantiated. The victim drowned while swimming in the Ohio River. Neither she nor the other children she was with were wearing life jackets. Maltreatment was substantiated against the two temporary caretakers for failure or inability to supply necessary supervision, which led to the child drowning and was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the fatality. The Department filed a petition against the caretakers. The proceedings in circuit court remain on-going. The caregivers were both charged for the victim's death.

Date of Death: July 19, 2025

Age: 15 years

Sex: Male

The mother has an extensive history with the child welfare system, including the involuntary termination of her parental rights to other children. The victim was raised almost entirely by a maternal relative, but, in early 2024, the maternal relative moved out of state and the victim began residing with his mother. After a finding that there were no identified safety threats, the court set aside the maternal relative's guardianship of the victim and gave full custody to his mother. A month prior to his death, the Department received a referral alleging that the victim and his girlfriend were smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol. The victim and his girlfriend were residing in the home with an infant child they shared. The victim was receiving services at the time of the fatality. On July 19, 2025, the victim died of an overdose. It was determined that he obtained the methamphetamine from his mother's significant other. Maltreatment was substantiated against the mother's significant other by providing the victim with drugs, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the fatality. The mother's significant other was criminally charged with delivery of a controlled substances to a minor resulting in death. The surviving sibling was returned to the custody of the maternal relative, until the sibling turned eighteen, and the matter was closed on April 10, 2026.

Date of Death: August 7, 2025

Age: 3 months

Sex: Male

There was only one prior referral which resulted in the Department substantiating maltreatment due to the mother's drug use at the time of the victim's birth. A petition was filed, but, by court order, the victim was allowed to remain in the custody of the father. At the time of death, both parents were receiving parenting and adult life skills, and the mother was receiving treatment for substance abuse. On August 7, 2025, the victim being found unresponsive with bruising and swelling on his forehead not consistent with lifesaving measures. Maltreatment was substantiated against the mother, father, and another adult relative residing in the home for the infliction of nonaccidental trauma, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the fatality. Maltreatment was further substantiated for physical injury, substance abuse by the caregivers, domestic violence, lack of supervision, failure to provide medical care, and concerns related to appropriate shelter. The earlier abuse and neglect petition was amended to include the new allegations, and the surviving siblings were removed from the home. The abuse and neglect proceedings are on-going.

Date of Death: September 6, 2025

Age: 14 years

Sex: Male

The victim lived in the home of his maternal great-grandparents since birth. Both of his parents predeceased him. The Department received two referrals on the family in 2025. While the second referral resulted in a temporary protection plan, neither led to the substantiation of maltreatment. On September 6, 2026, the victim consumed a significant amount of alcohol, became intoxicated, and began playing with a firearm. When his friends tried to intervene, the gun discharged and fatally shot the victim. Law-enforcement determined that the caregivers knowingly allowed the victim to drink alcohol, including on the day of his death, and that the caregivers appeared unfit due to advanced age and, for one, dementia. Maltreatment was substantiated, due to the caregivers knowingly allowing the victim to become intoxicated, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the fatality. The Department obtained custody of the victim's surviving sibling, and filed a petition. The great-grandparents both relinquished their custodial rights, and the prior legal guardianship was dissolved. The surviving sibling is in a kinship placement, pending adoption.

Appendix B: Child Near Fatality Summaries

Date of Near Fatality: October 29, 2024

Age: 1 year

Sex: Female

Between 2014 and 2015 the mother was assessed five times by the Department due to allegations of substance abuse, culminating in the involuntary termination of parental rights to other children. In 2019, the mother gave birth to another child, and a petition was filed due to the prior involuntary termination, but the petition was later dismissed by the court, without findings. When the victim was born in November 2023, another referral was made, and no maltreatment was substantiated, but, due to the prior involuntary termination, the Department provided services to the mother, and sought a non-emergency petition, which had not yet been filed at the time of the near fatality. On October 29, 2024, the victim was found unresponsive in a bathtub, and later tested positive for fentanyl. Maltreatment was substantiated against the mother for a lack of supervision and exposing the victim to drugs, which were determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the near fatality. The victim's father, who was incarcerated, was found to be neglectful, as he was not an active participant in her life and/or was not supporting the victim. The Department obtained an emergency ratification, filed a petition, and the parental rights of both parents were terminated. The victim achieved permanency through adoption in November 2025.

Date of Near Fatality: January 1, 2025

Age: 2 years

Sex: Male

In June 2023, the Department filed a petition against the parents, due to drug use. The following year, the court found that both parents successfully completed their improvement periods, and custody was returned. The mother was still participating in a community-based substance abuse treatment program at the time of the near fatality. On January 1, 2025, the victim ingested cocaine and suboxone, causing him to overdose. The father admitted that he relapsed. Initially, maltreatment was only substantiated against the father for exposing the victim to drugs, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the near fatality. Maltreatment was later substantiated against the mother, after it was determined that she would not take appropriate steps to remove herself and the children from the father. Through the court process, both parents were adjudicated, and both were granted improvement periods, which they successfully completed. Custody was eventually returned to the parents, and the case was closed in January 2026.

Date of Near Fatality: February 17, 2025

Age: 3 years

Sex: Male

There were two prior referrals in July 2021 and October 2023. While maltreatment was not substantiated for either, the Department did develop a plan for safe care in 2021, and referred the victim to Birth to Three. On February 17, 2025, the victim, while unsupervised, climbed on top of the washer/dryer, found a loaded firearm, and accidentally shot himself in the face. The conditions of the family home were found to be in deplorable conditions, and both parents admitted to drug use. Maltreatment was substantiated against both parents for lack of supervision, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the near fatality. Following the filing of a petition, the parents relinquished their parental rights, and the victim was adopted. Both parents were criminally charged with gross child neglect creating substantial risk of death.

Date of Near Fatality: March 3, 2025

Age: Newborn

Sex: Female

Between 2012 and 2014, the Department received three prior referrals on the mother, which eventually resulted in the termination of parental rights to other children. On March 3, 2025, the mother gave birth to the victim, who tested positive for THC and opiates, was born in severe respiratory distress and hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy, and was not expected to live. After her interview with the Department worker, the mother left the hospital and abandoned the victim. Maltreatment was substantiated against the mother due to her drug use during pregnancy, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the near fatality. A petition was filed, and the parental rights of both the mother and the unknown father were eventually terminated. After being discharged from the hospital, the victim was placed in foster care, and her adoption is pending.

Date of Near Fatality: March 22, 2025

Age: 2 months

Sex: Female

Between March 2022 and May 2024, the Department received three referrals relating to the family, but maltreatment was not substantiated for any. The parents were separated at the time of the incident. When the mother picked up the child at the scheduled custody exchange, the mother immediately noticed that the victim did not look well, and took her for medical care. It was determined that the victim had a collapsed lung, bruising on her chest consistent with a hand mark, and petechiae. She required two major surgeries to save her life and had to be placed into a medically induced coma. Maltreatment was substantiated against the father for the infliction of nonaccidental trauma, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the near fatality. No maltreatment was found against the mother of the victim. A petition was filed, the father's parental rights were ultimately terminated, and the mother of the father's other children voluntarily relinquished her parental rights following unrelated allegations. The victim's half-siblings are pending adoption. Throughout the proceedings, the victim remained in the care of her

non-abusing mother. The father was criminally charged with child abuse resulting in serious bodily injury and strangulation.

Date of Near Fatality: April 11, 2025

Age: 11 months

Sex: Male

There is no record of prior involvement with Child Protective Services. The parents were separated at the time of the incident, but the mother was allowing the father to visit the victim in the mother's home. On April 11, 2025, the victim overdosed on fentanyl. It was determined that the father was the reason the victim came into contact with the drug. Maltreatment was substantiated against both parents for exposing the victim to drugs, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the near fatality. The Department filed a petition, and both parents successfully completed improvement periods. The father was charged with gross neglect of a child creating a substantial risk or serious bodily injury or death, and felony possession of controlled substances with the intent to deliver.

Date of Near Fatality: May 17, 2025

Age: 8 months

Sex: Female

There is no record of prior involvement with Child Protective Services. The parents were separated at the time of the incident. While the victim was with her mother, the victim overdosed on fentanyl and cocaine. Maltreatment was substantiated against the mother for exposing the victim to drugs, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the near fatality. Maltreatment was not substantiated against the father. An abuse and neglect petition was filed, and the mother's parental rights were later terminated. The victim remains in the custody of her non-abusing father.

Date of Near Fatality: June 6, 2025

Age: 1 year

Sex: Female

There were three prior referrals between March 2024 and January 2025. While maltreatment was not substantiated, referrals for services were provided in 2024. On June 6, 2025, the victim overdosed while in the care of a babysitter. At the time they left the victim with the babysitter, the parents were aware of the babysitter's extensive criminal history, including prior drug charges. Although the parents were not determined to be responsible for the victim's overdose, maltreatment was substantiated against the parents for leaving the children with an inappropriate caregiver, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the near fatality. While the victim was in the hospital, another referral was received alleging that a sibling suffered non-

accidental trauma, but maltreatment was not substantiated for that claim. The Department obtained emergency custody of both children, and a petition was filed. The proceedings in circuit court are on-going.

Date of Near Fatality: July 10, 2025

Age: 11 months

Sex: Male

Between November 2015 and May 2025, the Department received six referrals on the family. The Department filed two separate petitions against the parents, which resulted in the termination of the mother's parental rights and the father's custodial rights to the victim's older siblings. The sixth referral was screened out without investigation. On July 10, 2025, the victim ingested fentanyl while in the home with his mother. The mother admitted to drug use around the victim. Maltreatment was substantiated against the mother for exposing the victim to drugs, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the near fatality. The victim was removed from the home, and a petition was filed. The abuse and neglect proceedings are on-going.

Date of Near Fatality: July 25, 2025

Age: Less than one month

Sex: Female

Following a referral in 2021, a petition was filed against the mother, and her parental rights were terminated to a sibling. On July 25, 2025, the victim was born at 28 weeks gestation and tested positive for fentanyl. Maltreatment was substantiated against the mother for drug use during pregnancy, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the near fatality. The Department filed a petition and removed the victim from the mother's care. Paternity has not yet been established. Publication has occurred for a putative father and an unknown father. The abuse and neglect proceedings are on-going.

Date of Near Fatality: September 7, 2025

Age: 4 months

Sex: Female

Two prior referrals were made in May 2013 and June 2014, but maltreatment was not substantiated. On September 7, 2025, the victim had a near-drowning incident while left unattended in the tub with an older sibling. Maltreatment was substantiated against the mother for neglect and lack of supervision, which was determined to be the cause or a contributing factor in the near fatality. A child abuse and neglect petition was later filed alleging lack of supervision. The child abuse and neglect proceedings are on-going.