# Critical Incident Review Team Final Report

Oregon Department of Human Services
CHILD WELFARE

A Critical Incident Review Team is convened by the Department Director when the Department becomes aware of a critical incident resulting in a child fatality that was reasonably believed to be the result of abuse and the child, child's sibling or another child living in the household with the child has had contact with the Department (ODHS). The reviews are called by the Department Director to quickly analyze ODHS actions in relation to the critical incident and to ensure the safety and well-being of all children within the custody of ODHS or during a child protective services assessment. The CIRT must complete a final report which serves to provide an overview of the critical incident, relevant Department history, and may include recommendations regarding actions that should be implemented to increase child safety. Reports must not contain any confidential information or records that may not be disclosed to members of the public. *The CIRT report is created at a specific time as required by statute and does not account for events occurring after the posting of the report*. Versions of all final reports are posted on the ODHS website.

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<tr><td colspan="3">CIRT ID: S9I6N6ZMB6</td></tr>
<tr><td>Date of critical incident:<br><br>November 9, 2024</td><td colspan="2">Date Department became aware of the fatality:<br><br>November 13, 2024</td></tr>
<tr><td>Date Department caused an investigation to be made:<br><br>November 13, 2024</td><td colspan="2">Date of child protective services (CPS) assessment disposition:<br><br>January 17, 2025</td></tr>
<tr><td>Date CIRT assigned:<br><br>November 14, 2024</td><td colspan="2">Date Final Report submitted:<br><br>February 21, 2025</td></tr>
<tr><td>Date of CIRT meetings:<br><br>December 11, 2024<br>January 13, 2025</td><td>Number of participants:<br>16<br>22</td><td>Members of the public?<br>No<br>No</td></tr>
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Level 3 - Restricted

**Description of the critical incident and Department contacts regarding the critical incident:**

| **Date of report:** | **Allegation(s):** | **Disposition(s):** |
|---|---|---|
| November 10, 2024 | Neglect by the mother<br>Neglect by the father<br>Threat of Harm by the father | Founded<br>Founded<br>Unfounded |
| November 13, 2024 | Physical abuse by the mother | Unable to Determine |
| **Assignment decision:**<br>Within 24 hours | | |

On November 10, 2024, ODHS received a report the mother had contacted a friend the previous day and stated her 5-year-old child was missing. The mother told her friend she and the child had laid down for a nap together and when she woke the child was gone. The mother did not want to notify law enforcement the child was missing and requested her friend travel to Oregon from the state they were residing in to help look for the child. The mother's friend then contacted local law enforcement in Oregon who responded to the scene.

The mother told police she and the child had fallen asleep around 1 p.m., and she woke up at 5 p.m. to find ducks in the home, the front door open, and the child missing. She reported searching the home and driving up and down the street looking for the child. The mother initially stated to police she believed the child's father had kidnapped and killed the child, reporting she had received text messages from him in the past stating he intended to murder her and the child. After it was confirmed by law enforcement the father was in another state, the mother speculated the child had died after becoming lost in the woods. She said the child was undiagnosed autistic or traumatized from witnessing domestic violence perpetrated by the father, as the child was low functioning for their age and selectively non-verbal. The mother's home was found to have garbage, moldy food, and duck feces throughout. There was a pond and a large forest behind the home. Law enforcement searched for the child until 3 a.m. without success. The

search was called off due to darkness and was set to resume at 8 a.m. The mother was said to be behaving erratically while interacting with police and fully believed the child was dead causing the reporter to speculate that she was experiencing a mental health crisis. Law enforcement did not believe the mother was under the influence of substances at the time.

The mother's friend reported to law enforcement the mother ended her relationship with the father in July 2024. At that time, the mother told her friend she was leaving Oregon due to a CPS assessment. The mother and the child then moved to another state to reside with the friend. The friend said while they lived in their home, she had concerns for neglect to the child by the mother as she was not attentive to the child's needs and did not follow through with getting them established with medical care or schooling. The friend also reported concerns for the mother's mental health. A CPS investigation was opened in the other state, and the mother and the child moved back to Oregon in October 2024.

Allegations of neglect to the child by the mother and threat of harm to the child by the father were assigned for CPS assessment with a 24-hour response time. During the course of the assessment, an allegation of neglect to the child by the father was added. These allegations were assessed alongside an allegation made in a report dated November 13, 2024, and the results were documented in a single report.

On November 10, 2024, the on-call CPS caseworker was notified by the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline (ORCAH) of the child's disappearance and contacted the on-call supervisor to staff the case. The on-call CPS caseworker then spoke with a deputy at the Sheriff's Department who advised the child was still missing and the search had been called off until daybreak due to poor visibility. The on-call CPS caseworker contacted law enforcement about eight hours later for an update and was told the child had still not been located. The on-call CPS caseworker staffed again with the on-call supervisor and drafted a declaration of protective custody for the child, which was sent to the court. The on-call CPS caseworker connected with law enforcement and contacted the mother at her home. The mother indicated she was too tired to speak with the on-call CPS caseworker as she hadn't slept since the previous day. The on-call CPS caseworker staffed the case again with the on-call supervisor then contacted the

mother's friend by phone. The mother's friend reported the mother, and child had come to stay with them and their family in July 2024 and had returned to Oregon at the end of October. The friend explained they and their family could no longer allow the mother and child to stay with them after CPS in their state became involved and the mother was not responding to their calls. The friend stated the mother had contacted them on the previous day to report the child was missing. The mother seemed convinced the father or the paternal grandmother had come to Oregon from the state where they were residing and took the child while they were napping. The mother was also fearful the child was wandering in the forest naked. The friend contacted law enforcement in Oregon to respond to the mother's home saying the mother did not contact law enforcement herself due to past trauma from involvement with law enforcement.

On the following day, the on-call CPS caseworker spoke with the mother's friend again via text and phone then contacted law enforcement to provide them with the information the friend had disclosed. The on-call CPS caseworker contacted law enforcement a short time later to advise the order for protective custody of the child had been signed and arranged for a copy to be sent to a detective on the case. The newly assigned CPS caseworker met with members of the Sheriff's Department and FBI to assist in the search and investigation. Law enforcement officials reported it was still unclear when the child went missing, and they believed the mother was not being forthcoming with them. An officer was shown pictures of the home taken by ODHS during a prior CPS assessment and they stated the home was in significantly worse condition when they responded. Alcohol cans were scattered throughout the home, human feces were on the walls and ceilings and there were destroyed objects on the floors. While officers were searching for the child, the mother's friends came to the home to clean it. The CPS caseworker checked to see if the child was enrolled in any of the local schools and learned they were not. The CPS caseworker then requested records regarding the child from several area medical providers.

On November 13, 2024, ODHS received a report the child was found deceased by law enforcement approximately 1.6 miles from the home they shared with their mother. The reporter did not know the circumstances or details of the child's death but reported law enforcement was investigating

it as a potential homicide. The local Sheriff's office and FBI were said to both be working the investigation. An allegation of physical abuse to the child by an unknown perpetrator was assigned for CPS assessment with a 24-hour response time. The local ODHS office assessed this as an allegation of abuse by the mother as there was no evidence the child had contact with any other individuals other than the mother between the time they were reported missing and the time they were found deceased.

The CPS caseworker contacted law enforcement and was informed the mother had stated she would not speak to anyone without a lawyer present and had left the area. The mother's friends reported she went to a treatment program in another county. The CPS caseworker learned the child's autopsy was scheduled for that day, however test results would not likely be available for quite some time. The law enforcement officer stated the child's death would be investigated as a potential homicide. The mother was escorted off her property by law enforcement after the discovery of the child's body. The CPS caseworker then staffed the case with their supervisor, the local safety consultant and district leadership. The CPS caseworker spoke to an employee of the school district in the other state where the child and mother were recently residing and learned the child was enrolled in school there on September 10 and was disenrolled on November 5 after missing 12 consecutive days of school. The mother had not responded to phone calls from the child's school regarding the absences. The CPS caseworker attempted to contact the child's father by phone at a number provided by law enforcement, but the number was no longer in service.

The CPS caseworker acquired updated contact information for the father then spoke with him by phone. He reported he was the child's caregiver for the first two years of their life. The child was born in another state and the family moved to Oregon when the child was about nine months old. During the COVID pandemic, the family isolated themselves at home as much as possible as they did not want the child to become sick. The father said he noticed the child seemed to have some cognitive delays and odd behaviors resulting in the child's pediatrician feeling they may be on the autism spectrum and recommended testing. The father stated the mother was resistant to any testing or referrals for the child due to the concerns. He said he moved out of the home in late September/early October 2023. The

father reported that while he was living with the mother, they were both drinking alcohol to excess and would often purchase alcohol daily. The father also disclosed using marijuana when he was not caring for the child. He said the mother was taking prescribed Adderall and anti-depressant medication. He denied she would parent the child while under the influence of substances but then disclosed she would become frustrated with the child's behaviors when she was under the influence and would lock the child in a room by themself resulting in the father needing to intervene. The father said he felt the mother was struggling with depression and would just sleep when she was overwhelmed. When asked about the child, the father said they were afraid of the woods as they had sensory issues and did not like plants brushing up against them. He said the child would melt down when something hit them or brushed up against them in the woods. He reported the child had a limited vocabulary and would speak in one-to-three-word phrases. The father stated that while he lived in the home, he installed chain locks on the doors the child could not reach.

Also on November 13, the CPS caseworker spoke with a program manager for an agency providing services to developmentally delayed persons, who reported the child was not enrolled in any services through them.

On November 14, 2024, the CPS caseworker spoke with a deputy from the Sheriff's Department about the investigation and learned the FBI had taken over the case and Sheriff's deputies stood by outside of the mother's home while the FBI searched the home. Later that day, the CPS caseworker spoke with a maternal relative who reported not speaking with the mother since she moved in with the father years earlier. The maternal relative said the mother struggled with depression and would sleep for weeks when depressed. The CPS caseworker then spoke with the child's former babysitter by phone. They said they had no contact with the mother and child after they returned to Oregon in late October. The babysitter reported caring for the child in April and May 2024 and when they began babysitting the child, the babysitter became concerned about the child's weight as their ribs were clearly visible. They reported the child would typically eat items like candy, cookies, and chicken nuggets as well as food that had been left out for days on the kitchen counters. The babysitter said the child would become destructive when they weren't receiving attention, throwing items and food throughout the house. They reported coming to the house to

babysit on several occasions and the child could be seen through the windows self-entertaining while the mother was sleeping. The babysitter said they had to bang on the doors and windows and call the mother to get her to wake up. They reported that there was urine, human feces, and alcohol bottles with various amounts of alcohol in them scattered throughout the home and they were concerned the child had access to these items. When asked by the CPS caseworker about the mother's use of medications, the babysitter responded she was taking depression, anxiety, and weight loss medications. They did not believe the child would have wandered away from the home as they were afraid of the woods, however, the child would go to the front door and feed the ducks from the doorway. On November 15, 2024, the CPS caseworker learned the FBI was turning the investigation into the child's death back over to the local Sheriff's Department. Later the CPS caseworker left a voicemail for the mother offering assistance with funeral and burial expenses and requested a return call. The CPS caseworker then spoke with the father who reported he was checking himself into a clinic due to his struggles coping with the child's death. On November 18, the CPS caseworker left another voicemail for the mother and also left a voicemail with the mother's friend in an effort to establish contact with the mother.

On November 20, 2024, the CPS caseworker obtained medical records for the child. Notes from a November 2021 check-up indicated the child's pediatrician would be referring them for an autism evaluation. It was noted the child had essentially not been in public for two years due to the parents' concerns about COVID. In March 2022, there was a chart note stating a medical assistant had tried to contact the parents about an autism evaluation. During a well child check in December 2023, concerns were noted again for the child's delays and additional referrals for testing and services were made. The doctor noted the mother had concerns about the child being autistic one to two years prior but was not able to follow up on referrals due to objections from the father. During this appointment, the mother reported being the survivor of physical and emotional abuse by the father but believed the child did not witness this abuse nor was the child abused by the father.

The allegation of neglect to the child by the mother was determined to be founded as she did not follow through in having the child assessed for their

developmental delays, she exposed the child to an unsafe and unsanitary living environment, and she did not meet the child's supervision needs resulting in them wandering away from the home without clothing in inclement weather and being found deceased. The allegation of neglect to the child by the father was also determined to be founded as he was aware the child had special needs that required testing to be addressed but did not follow through in scheduling those assessments. The father was also aware the mother was not able to meet the child's needs while under the influence of substances but chose not to intervene to keep the child safe. The allegation of threat of harm to the child by the father was determined to be unfounded as despite the mother's statements she had been assaulted by the father in the past there was no evidence gathered the child witnessed any violence and the father was residing in another state at the time of the CPS assessment. The allegation of physical abuse to the child by the mother was coded as unable to determine as at the time of their death the child appeared to have no apparent physical injuries, however at the time of the completion of the assessment the final autopsy, medical examiner, and toxicology reports were not complete.

**Description of relevant prior Department reports under the case name of the child's mother:**

| **Date of report:**<br>May 14, 2024<br>**Assignment decision:**<br>Within 72 hours | **Allegation(s):**<br>Neglect by the mother<br>Threat of Harm by the father | **Disposition(s):**<br>Unfounded<br>Unable to Determine |
|---|---|---|
| **Date of report:**<br>July 12, 2024<br>**Assignment decision:**<br>Within 24 hours | Threat of Harm by the mother | Unfounded |

On May 14, 2024, ODHS received a report the mother was not meeting the needs of her 5-year-old child, who was described as autistic and non-verbal. Their home was described as unsanitary, with food on the floor throughout. The mother reportedly worked overnight shifts on Friday and

Saturday nights, then would come home and begin drinking. The reporter stated the mother would drink heavily daily and sleep during the day, leaving the child unsupervised. Beer bottles were said to be around the mother's bed and in the living room within the child's reach. The mother was reported as saying she was lonely and depressed. While unsupervised, the child would throw food and chocolate milk around the house and the mother would not clean the messes up. It was reported the child had once spilled a potty chair on the floor and the mother just threw a paper towel over the feces and urine and did not clean it up for days. The child was said to be a picky eater, and the mother would typically feed them pizza, chicken nuggets, cookies, candy, marshmallows, dry cereal, and chocolate milk. They were reported to be very thin, have unkempt long hair, and would go for long periods without bathing or brushing their teeth. The mother was reported to be engaging in increasingly impulsive behaviors including driving dangerously with the child in the car. It was reported that in February 2024, the mother was observed to be passing other vehicles in the median and on the side of the road, almost hitting a parked car while the child was with her. The reporter stated the child's father had recently moved out of the home and the mother had said he was physically and mentally abusive to her when they were together. The father was reportedly the primary caregiver for the child while the couple was together. The mother said the father was a veteran, had his own mental health challenges, and was unable to own firearms due to a history of violent crimes. The mother was said to be considering allowing the father back into her life to help care for the child despite reporting she was fearful he would kill her when they resided together in the past. Allegations of neglect to the child by the mother and threat of harm to the child by the father were assigned for CPS assessment with a 72-hour response time. The allegations in this report were assessed together with an allegation from a report made on July 12, 2024, and the results were documented in a single CPS assessment.

On May 15, 2024, the CPS caseworker staffed the case with their supervisor, then contacted local medical practices and hospitals who all reported having no records for the child (at the time of the CPS assessment it was believed the child shared the mother's last name. It was later learned the child shared their father's last name). The CPS caseworker attempted

to visit the mother and child at home, but no one answered the door despite the mother's car being in the driveway. The CPS caseworker left a business card on the front door requesting a call back. Later in the day the CPS caseworker attempted to call the father, but the voice mailbox was full, so a text was sent to him with a picture of the CPS caseworker's business card asking for a return call.

On May 17, 2024, the CPS caseworker again visited the mother's home. There was no answer at the door, but the child was seen looking out a window briefly before running away. No noises could be heard coming from inside the home. The CPS caseworker left another business card for the mother. Later that afternoon the CPS caseworker again attempted contact with the mother and child. The mother answered the door, said the child was sleeping and would not allow the CPS caseworker into the home, stating she intended to hire an attorney. The mother said a babysitter used to care for the child on Friday and Saturday evenings while she worked, but she now had other friends from work watch them on those evenings. She reported the child's father had been very abusive to her. The mother said the child had witnessed the abuse, but stated the father was never physical with the child. She denied the allegations in the report, saying she drank alcohol occasionally but not daily. She denied the child ever went without food and admitted her home was dirty because she was working full time as well as attending school online.

On May 22, 2024, the CPS caseworker spoke to the babysitter. The babysitter said they cared for the child for about four months. The babysitter reported having a falling out with the mother on May 10, and they had not seen the child since. They said the mother's home was a mess due to her not cleaning up after the child. The babysitter said they would watch the child overnight and the mother would return home from her job in the morning with alcohol and immediately start drinking. They stated the mother suspected the child was autistic and was going to have them tested. The babysitter reported the child would not wear clothing, had a limited vocabulary, acted out behaviorally, and was a picky eater. The child was said to be easily frustrated and was constantly seeking the mother's attention.

Documents obtained during the CPS assessment show child welfare records were requested from three states. All three states reported having no records on the family. Additional information obtained during the assessment included a text message from a person to an unknown individual reporting witnessing the mother driving dangerously, passing people on the side of the road and medians, tailgating, and almost hitting a parked car. The author of the text was not aware if there were any children in the vehicle and said they reported it to police, who confirmed they had received another report about the incident but did not have the resources available at the time to investigate. Numerous photos were obtained during the assessment and document the condition of the mother's home. The photos show beer cans, bottles, tools, and garbage scattered outside the home. There were clothing and toys also scattered on the floors throughout the home. What appears to be chocolate milk and chocolate syrup was splattered on the floors and walls in many areas of the home as well. Dirty dishes were piled on the counters. The CPS caseworker documented observing the conditions of the home on multiple occasions and stated though the home was messy the conditions were not a safety threat to the child.

On May 23, 2024, the CPS caseworker staffed the case with their supervisor and the local safety consultant. Later the CPS caseworker spoke with the mother's co-worker. The co-worker said on the occasions they visited the mother's home, there were empty beer cans and dirty dishes everywhere. They reported cleaning the home on a few occasions, but each time they returned it would be dirtier. The CPS caseworker then attempted to visit the mother and child at home. The mother's car was observed to be in the driveway but there was no answer at the door or any response to phone calls and texts left by the CPS caseworker.

On May 28, 2024, the CPS caseworker contacted the mother at home. The CPS caseworker was permitted to observe the child, who was sleeping at the time. The mother agreed to meet with the CPS caseworker the following day. On May 29, the CPS caseworker met with the mother and child at their home. The mother explained that abuse from the father intensified during the COVID pandemic. The mother said she did not realize how bad things had become until he left. After the father moved out, she stated she found marijuana cartridges around the property. In addition

to his marijuana use, the mother also reported he would drink to excess and snort Adderall. She said she would have to take her medications to work with her so he would not use them. The mother said she planned on going back to school in another state in July and would be taking the child to her relative's home in a third state and enroll them in services while she finished her schooling. She stated she would be leaving Oregon in two days with the child to visit her relative and see how the child got along with their family.

On June 3, 2024, the CPS caseworker spoke by phone to the mother's relative. They confirmed the mother and child were currently at their home and said the mother had been through quite a bit and it was good for her to be around family. The relative said the child had been isolated, had special needs that required extra attention, and they felt the mother was focused on the child's needs. The relative described the child as very smart and said they could spell several words on their own and would often speak to themselves. The CPS caseworker then left voicemails for two of the mother's friends and a co-worker. The CPS caseworker left a voicemail for the child's pediatrician asking for a return call. There is no documentation in the assessment the CPS caseworker received return calls from these individuals.

On July 12, 2024, ODHS received a report the mother's home was unsafe and unsanitary. Food was said to be all over the floor, furniture and other objects were toppled over, and there was a strong odor of paint coming from the home. The mother had commented in the past her home was in this condition due to her being in school, working and being a full-time mother, but the reporter felt the condition of the home reflected something more serious occurring. The mother was said to suffer from depression and anxiety and the reporter also felt she was abusing alcohol. The reporter stated the mother had isolated herself from her support system and no one had heard from her in a week. A previously open CPS assessment was reportedly not able to be completed due to the mother and child moving to another state. The screener contacted the CPS caseworker for the family who confirmed they were unable to complete the assessment due to the family moving. An allegation of threat of harm to the child by the mother was assigned for CPS assessment with a 24-hour response time. The allegation in this report was assessed along with allegations made in a

previous report from May 14, 2024, and the results were documented in a single CPS assessment.

On July 12, 2024, the CPS caseworker spoke to the mother's relative. The relative reported the mother and child left their home to return to Oregon on June 11, 2024. While in the relative's state, the family planned for the mother and child to return to Oregon, sell their home, then return to the relative's state where they would both be enrolled in services. The relative stated the child needed a consistent diet and sleep schedule. The relative was concerned they had not heard from the mother in a week. The CPS caseworker then spoke with an officer from the Sheriff's Department who completed a welfare check at the family's home. The officer reported the home was very dirty with food and stains on the floor and items knocked over. The mother appeared to be having a hard time focusing and the officer believed she may have been experiencing depression and anxiety. The officer reported the child appeared to be healthy.

On July 13, 2024, an on-call CPS caseworker attempted contact with the mother and child at home. There was no car present and no answer at the door. A voicemail message was left for the mother requesting a call back. The smell of fresh paint was coming from open windows. The on-call CPS caseworker spoke with the on-call supervisor and was advised to make another attempt to contact the family on the following day. On July 14, the on-call CPS caseworker again attempted to visit the mother and child at home. The mother's car was present, but there was no answer at the door and a business card was left for her. On July 15, the CPS caseworker attempted to visit the mother and child at home. The mother's car was in the driveway, but there was no answer at the door.

On July 16, 2024, the CPS caseworker was able to meet with the mother and child at their home. The child was noted as appearing happy and healthy. The mother admitted to struggling with her mental health but stated she and the child were fine. She said three weeks prior the father had stated he was going to come to Oregon to kill her and the child. She reported she and the child would be leaving in a few days to another state and would be staying there with a friend for four months while she completed educational requirements for her profession. The mother stated

she had an ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis) therapist set up in the other state to work with the child.

On July 19, 2024, the CPS caseworker left a voicemail for the mother's friend and also left a voicemail and text for the mother asking her to call the CPS caseworker. On July 23, the CPS caseworker again left voicemails for the mother and her friend requesting a call back. The CPS caseworker also left a voicemail for the mother's relative.

On July 24, 2024, the CPS caseworker spoke with the mother's friend who reported the mother and child arrived at her home on July 22. The mother and child each had rooms of their own. The mother's friend said her relative also resided in the home and was an ABA therapist experienced in working with autistic children and their families. The friend stated they were a mental health professional and would be helping the mother get connected with treatment and medication. Later in the day, the CPS caseworker left a voicemail for the mother. There is no documentation to indicate the mother called the CPS caseworker back prior to the conclusion of the CPS assessment.

The allegation of neglect to the child by the mother was determined to be unfounded as while the house was quite messy it was not unsafe for the child and the mother was making efforts to obtain support from friends in caring for the child while she planned on enrolling them in services. The allegation of threat of harm to the child by the father was coded as unable to determine as the mother reported she was mentally and physically abused by him in the child's presence, however the impact on the child was unknown as they were unable to be interviewed, and the father was unable to be located for his response to the allegation. The allegation of threat of harm to the child by the mother was coded as unfounded, however the CPS caseworker did not document the reasoning for the disposition.

| **Date of report:**<br>October 22, 2024<br><br>**Assignment decision:**<br>Closed at Screening | **Allegation(s):**<br><br>Physical Abuse by the father | **Disposition(s):**<br><br>Not Applicable |
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On October 2, 2024, ODHS received a report the father sent a text message threatening to find and murder the mother and child who were reported to be living in another state. It was unknown where the father was residing. The father was said to be physically and verbally abusive to the mother and child while they were living in Oregon. Since the mother and child returned to the other state from Oregon it was reported the child had not been regularly attending school. The child was said to have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) due to developmental delays. The reporter stated the child knew a few words but was mostly non-verbal, would talk to themselves, and would see things others could not see. The report was closed at screening as the family was not residing in Oregon and child welfare and law enforcement in the other state were already aware of the report.

**Description of relevant Department reports under the case names of the prior CPS supervisor and CPS caseworker:**

| **Date of report:**<br>November 13, 2024<br><br>**Assignment decision:**<br>Closed at Screening | **Allegation(s):**<br>Neglect by the CPS Supervisor and CPS Caseworker | **Disposition(s):**<br><br>Not Applicable |
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On November 13, 2024, ODHS received a report indicating that a prior CPS assessment of neglect and threat of harm to the child was received in May 2024 and closed on August 5, 2024, without ODHS fully addressing all allegations and dispositions. This report was forwarded from the Oregon Child Abuse Hotline (ORCAH) to the Office of Training, Investigations and Safety (OTIS) for a screening decision on allegations of abuse to the child by third parties.

OTIS reviewed the May 2024 CPS assessment which opened due to neglect by the mother and threat of harm by the father. In July 2024, an additional report of threat of harm by the mother was received and linked to the May 2024 CPS assessment. During the May CPS assessment, the caseworker made multiple attempts to meet with the mother and child, and

on May 29, 2024, had face-to-face contact with them in their home, observing no safety concerns.

The mother told the CPS caseworker she planned on moving out of state where a relative could help care for the child while the mother went back to school. On July 12 the CPS caseworker spoke by phone with the mother's relative and learned the mother had returned to Oregon on June 11 to sell her home and tie up loose ends however they had not heard from her in a week. Police went to the home to conduct a welfare check and found the home to be very dirty with food and stains on the floor. The police officer who made contact believed the mother was experiencing anxiety and depression but noted the child appeared to be okay.

On July 13, an on-call CPS caseworker attempted to visit the mother and child, but no one appeared to be home. The assigned CPS caseworker made another attempt on July 15 but was also unsuccessful. The following day, July 16, the CPS caseworker was able to contact the mother and child at their home. Documentation by the CPS caseworker noted the child appeared to be happy and healthy. On July 24, the CPS caseworker received a phone call confirming the mother and child were in another state where they could be supported by the mother's friends. On August 5, the CPS supervisor approved closure of the CPS assessment.

OTIS noted that while the mother was initially uncooperative with ODHS, she eventually began to cooperate, and the CPS caseworker was able to gather the necessary information to assess the child's safety. OTIS also noted that at the time of the closure of the CPS assessment, the mother and child had moved to another state to reside with a mental health practitioner and an ABA therapist who worked with autistic children and their families. It was determined there was no indication the ODHS caseworker or supervisor were negligent in their actions on the case. The report was closed at screening as it was not a report of abuse.

**Description of concerns regarding actions taken or not taken by the Department or law enforcement agencies in response to the critical incident or events that led to the critical incident:**

The CIRT determined that sufficient information to support safety planning was gathered during the CPS assessment, open from May 2024 through August 2024. However, ODHS did not intervene with the family due to the mother's plans to move in with friends and family in other states on two separate occasions, with the intention of receiving additional parenting support, only to return to Oregon shortly thereafter. It was acknowledged that ODHS had no capacity to manage the child's safety while in the mother's care out of state.

The CIRT noted additional information, and exploration was required to more accurately determine how the child's special needs, the mother's substance use and mental health, and exposure to domestic violence impacted the child's safety. Subject matter experts were not utilized in this case.

The CIRT identified the child needed diagnostic testing for autism and services and supports to address their special needs. When a child has special needs, CPS caseworkers are asked to determine whether the child has a Developmental Disability (DD) case manager. If the child does not, CPS caseworkers are instructed to consider making a referral or referring the family to other community services relevant to the child's needs. In this case, there is no documentation that reflects services being offered or the family accepting services.

The CIRT acknowledged that biases can impact critical case decisions. While neglect disproportionately affects families experiencing poverty, biases can also emerge across all socio-economic levels. In this case, the parent's socio-economic and professional status may have influenced the ODHS staff's assessment of the parent's ability to meet their child's needs without ODHS support.

**Recommendations for improvement in the administration and oversight of the child welfare system that are specific to the critical incident and any historical information reviewed by the team:**

The CIRT recommends that the current guidance in the ODHS Child Welfare Procedure Manual be strengthened regarding services and supports for children with special needs. Specifically, CPS caseworkers must determine if a child with special needs has a Developmental Disabilities (DD) case manager. If the child does not, CPS caseworkers must make appropriate referrals for services and supports. If a parent disagrees with such referral for services, this must be documented in the case record. This updated guidance will be incorporated into the Child Welfare Procedure Manual no later than April 30, 2025. This requirement must occur on CPS assessments that are closing as well as CPS assessments that result in an open case.

In response to this incident, the local office has revised its criteria for cases requiring a high-risk case staffing. The updated criteria now include cases where children have, or are suspected to have, special needs, as well as cases in which families intend to relocate out of state during a CPS assessment. These high-risk case staffings will involve the participation of relevant local and statewide subject matter experts. The new criteria for high-risk case staffing will be implemented immediately.

To mitigate biases, regular supervision for caseworkers, case staffing strategies like group supervision, and access to subject matter expert supports are essential. These practices help maintain objectivity and foster critical thinking by incorporating the perspectives of multiple child welfare professionals when evaluating decisions related to child safety. The local office will expand their use of local and state subject matter experts and ensure regular supervision is occurring. The implementation of these recommendations must commence immediately, with local leadership establishing clear metrics to track progress in achieving desired results.

Lastly, due to the high number of CIRTs involving children with intellectual and developmental needs, a systematic review of cases examined by the CIRT over the past five years is currently underway to assess potential barriers to the quality of care and support provided to families.