

Summary Report	Fatality	07/10/2024
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1. Victim: Damien Coats – 3-year-old male

2. Was the child residing in the child's home or in an out-of-home placement at the time of the fatality?

The child was residing in his home when the following incident occurred:

On January 25, 2023, the Department of Child Safety received a report regarding 3-year-old Damien Coats, who was transported to the hospital when found unresponsive and stiff in the home. Medical providers administered Narcan and his symptoms temporarily improved, but he ultimately died due to fentanyl intoxication. On June 25, 2024, the Department substantiated the allegation of neglect as to Venicia Belarde.

3. If the victim in the Preliminary Report involved a child residing in the child's home, the following information will be provided:

a. Services being provided to the child, a member of the child's family or the person suspected of the abuse or neglect at the time of the incident and the date of the last contact before the incident between the entity providing services and the person receiving services:

There were no services being provided to the family by the Department of Child Safety at the time of the incident.

b. Was the child, a member of the child's family or the person suspected of the abuse or neglect the subject of a report for investigation at the time of the incident?

No.

c. All involvement of the child's parents and of the person suspected of the abuse or neglect in a situation for which a report for investigation was made or in services provided pursuant to this chapter in the five years preceding the incident:

The child's mother, Venicia Belarde, was involved in the following prior report:

On July 10, 2017, a report was received alleging neglect to a child by the mother, Venicia Belarde, and their father. Following an assessment of child safety, the child was removed from the home and placed in a licensed foster home. A dependency petition was filed with the Maricopa County Supreme Court and the allegation was substantiated. The Department provided services to the family. A guardianship

petition was filed for this child. The guardianship was granted and the case closed on June 15, 2018.

d. Any investigation pursuant to a report for investigation concerning the child, a member of the child's family or the person suspected of the abuse or neglect or services provided to the child or the child's family since the date of the incident involving the fatality:

The report regarding the fatality incident was investigated and the case was closed on June 20, 2023. There were no other children in the home. The allegation of neglect to Damien by Ms. Belarde was substantiated. No subsequent reports of abuse or neglect were received regarding the family.

4. If the victim in the Preliminary Report involved a child residing in an out-of-home placement, the following information will be provided:

a. Licensing Agency:

N/A

b. Licensing history of the out-of-home placement, including the type of license held by the operator of the placement and the period for which the placement has been licensed:

N/A

c. Summary of all violations by the licensee:

N/A

d. Any other actions by the licensee or an employee of the licensee that constitute a substantial failure to protect and promote the health, safety and welfare of a child.

N/A

5. Actions taken by the Department in response to the case including any changes to policy or practice and/or recommendations for further changes in policies, practices, rules or statutes:

The Department conducted a joint investigation with the Apache Junction Police Department. There were no other children in the home and the case was closed. The allegation of neglect to Damien by Ms. Belarde was substantiated. No subsequent reports of abuse or neglect were received regarding the family.

Additionally, in accordance with the DCS Strategic Plan for State Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16), multidisciplinary team (MDT) reviews of fatality and near fatality cases were implemented during the first quarter of FY16. The MDT reviews fatality and near fatality cases with prior DCS involvement, which are a key feature of the Strategic Plan and supports the objective of increasing the accuracy of safety and risk assessments in investigations.

Cases are reviewed by the MDT in order to identify any systemic factors, both internal and external to the Department that may have had an impact. The Department uses the

aggregate data gathered through all of the MDT reviews to assess and guide future changes and/or recommendations to policies, practices, rules or statutes. Findings from these reviews are compiled into an annual report to be shared on the DCS website. The target date for release of the next report is December 1, 2024.