

Summary Report	Fatality	04/15/2024
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1. Victim: Serenity Hernandez – 8-month-old female

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 her home when the following incident occurred:

On September 16, 2023, the Department of Child Safety received a report regarding 8-month-old female, Serenity Hernandez, being found unresponsive in her home while in the care of her mother, Melissa Rocha, and her father. Serenity was taken to the hospital where she passed away on September 23, 2023; her cause of death was ascribed to complications of fentanyl intoxication. On November 15, 2023, the Maricopa County Superior Court found that the mother, Melissa Rocha, neglected the child.

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:

DCS received the following prior reports involving Melissa Rocha and Serenity Hernandez:

On December 18, 2022, a report was received alleging neglect to Serenity Hernandez by her mother, Melissa Rocha. The allegations were substantiated. Ms. Rocha was referred for services by the Department and was participating in these services when a subsequent report was received.

On March 8, 2023, a report was received alleging neglect to Serenity Hernandez by her mother, Melissa Rocha. The allegations were unsubstantiated. Ms. Rocha continued participating in previously offered services. The case was still open when the next report was received.

On March 30, 2023, a report was received alleging neglect to Serenity Hernandez by her mother, Melissa Rocha. The allegations were unsubstantiated. Ms. Rocha continued participating in the previously offered services. Ms. Rocha successfully completed services and the case was closed on August 10, 2023.

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 investigation of the fatality report resulted in the child's siblings being removed from the home and placed with relatives. The Department filed a dependency petition with the Maricopa County Juvenile Court and services are being provided. On November 15, 2023, the Court found that the mother, Melissa Rocha, neglected Serenity. A joint investigation was conducted with the Avondale Police Department. There have been no subsequent reports of abuse or neglect 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 Avondale Police Department. Following an assessment of child safety, the siblings in the home were removed and placed with relatives. The Department filed a dependency petition with the Maricopa County Superior Court and is providing services to the family. On November 15, 2023, the Court

found that the mother, Melissa Rocha, neglected Serenity. There were no subsequent reports of abuse or neglect 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.