

Statement on the death of an eight-year-old girl, Marlai Smith

Date Issued: March 31, 2023

On September 19, 2020, the Arizona Department of Child Safety received a report regarding the death of an eight-year-old girl, Marlai Smith.

According to the report, Marlai was found unresponsive in her home and was suffering from extensive bruising throughout her body. She was taken to a hospital where she died due to her injuries on September 22, 2020.

The Mesa Police Department arrested Marlai's mother, Chaimara Washington, and Ms. Washington's boyfriend, Brandon Cooper. Ms. Washington and Mr. Cooper were charged with first degree murder and child abuse on February 8, 2022.

DCS immediately removed the other children living in the home at the time of the incident and placed them in foster care.

The Department provided services to the family. The children were reunified with their fathers.

DCS received the following prior reports involving the family:

On December 16, 2018, the Department received a report alleging Ms. Washington's former boyfriend neglected Marlai and her siblings. The report alleged the boyfriend provided marijuana to the children. The DCS investigation did not find evidence to support the allegations. The children underwent a toxicology screen and the results were negative. The allegations were unsubstantiated and the case was closed.

On February 21, 2020, a report was received alleging neglect to Marlai and two of her siblings by their mother, Chaimara Washington. The report alleged Ms. Washington was exposing the children to marijuana by leaving it on tables, counters and other areas where the children could access it. The DCS investigation did not find evidence to support the allegations and the case was closed after the family was referred for services within the community.

There were no prior reports received involving Mr. Cooper.