

Statement on the death of eight-month-old, Serenity Hernandez

Date Issued: April 15, 2024

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 transported to the hospital where she passed away on September 23, 2023; her cause of death was ascribed to complications of fentanyl intoxication.

Following an assessment of child safety, the other children in the home were taken into custody and placed with relatives.

On October 12, 2023, the Department filed a dependency petition with the Maricopa County Superior Court for Serenity's siblings. On November 15, 2023, the court found that the mother, Melissa Rocha, neglected Serenity.

The Department is providing services to the family.

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 report alleged that Ms. Rocha tested positive for cocaine at the time of Serenity's birth and that Serenity was born substance exposed. The allegations were substantiated. The investigation determined Serenity and her siblings as safe in their mother's care with a safety plan in place. 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 report alleged that Ms. Rocha left Serenity unattended in a vehicle during a domestic dispute with family members. The DCS investigation did not find evidence to support the allegations. The allegations were unsubstantiated and 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 report alleged that Ms. Rocha threw Serenity into a trashcan while engaging in a physical domestic dispute with Serenity's father. The DCS investigation did not find evidence to support the allegations. The allegations were unsubstantiated and Ms. Rocha continued participating in the previously offered services. Ms. Rocha successfully completed services and the case was closed on August 10, 2023.