

## Statement on the near-death of 7-year-old male and 5-year-old female

**Date Issued: December 12, 2024**

On July 1, 2024, the Department of Child Safety received a report regarding a 7-year-old male child and 5-year-old female child who had been involved in a wrong way motor vehicle crash and were not properly restrained. Upon examination, the 7-year-old male child was found to be in serious condition, having sustained facial fractures and trauma to his lungs. The 5-year-old female child was also found to be in serious condition requiring intubation and intensive care. The near-fatality victims were in the care of their mother, Veronica Leon, when the accident occurred.

Following an assessment of child safety, the near-fatality victims were assessed as safe in the care of their other parent.

On August 5, 2024, Veronica Leon was indicted on multiple charges including child abuse, endangerment and aggravated driving while under the influence of liquor. On November 22, 2024, Veronica Leon pleaded guilty to one count of aggravated driving while under the influence of liquor, two counts of endangerment, and one count of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon.

The Department provided the family with information on services available in the community.

DCS received the following prior reports involving Ms. Leon:

On August 13, 2020, the Department received a report alleging neglect to the near-fatality victims by another adult and Ms. Leon. The report alleged the other adult was using substances in the home and the children had access to it. The DCS investigation did not find evidence to support the allegation. The allegation was unsubstantiated. The mother declined voluntary in-home services offered by the Department and the case was closed on September 16, 2020.

On December 1, 2020, the Department received a report alleging neglect to the near-fatality victims by another adult and Ms. Leon. The report alleged other adult was involved in a car accident with the children. The DCS investigation did not find evidence to support the allegation. The allegation was unsubstantiated. The Department referred the family to in-home services and the DCS investigation was closed on January 7, 2021.

On February 23, 2021, the Department received a report alleging neglect to the near-fatality victims by another adult and Ms. Leon. The report alleged there was a domestic violence altercation that occurred in front of the children between Ms. Leon and the other adult. The DCS investigation did not find evidence to support the allegation. The allegation was unsubstantiated. The family was still receiving voluntary in-home services at the time of this report. The Department recommended the parents to continue with these services and the case was closed on April 5, 2021.

On March 20, 2021, the Department received a report alleging neglect and physical abuse to the near-fatality victims by another adult and Ms. Leon. The report alleged there was a domestic violence altercation that

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occurred in front of the children between Ms. Leon and the other adult. The DCS investigation found evidence to support the allegation of neglect, which was substantiated. As a result, the children were removed from the home and the Department filed a dependency petition with the Pima County Superior Court. Services were provided to the family.

On November 5, 2021, the Department received a report alleging neglect to the near-fatality victims by Ms. Leon. The report alleged Ms. Leon was arrested for an aggravated DUI and had the children in the car. The DCS investigation found evidence to support the allegation of neglect, which was substantiated. A subsequent report was received prior to the closure of this investigation.

On January 13, 2022, the Department received a report alleging neglect and physical abuse to the near-fatality victims by another adult and Ms. Leon. The report alleged concerns for the safety and well-being of the children due to domestic violence in the home. The DCS investigation did not find evidence to support the allegations. The allegations were unsubstantiated and the family was still receiving services through their ongoing Dependency with the Department. The children were returned to their mother's care and the case was dismissed on October 14, 2022.