

March 22, 2019

Statement, DCFS Interim Director Debra Dyer-Webster

“Ja’hir Gibbons was just 2 years old when he died this week, and the amount of pain this child experienced in his short life is devastating. Our whole agency is shaken by this loss, as we are anytime children in our care die. We must do better, whether it’s how we investigate and respond to these cases, how we oversee and use the private agencies we contract to provide services, and in how we communicate with the communities we serve. The governor has made it clear that protecting vulnerable children is a core priority, and in providing 126 additional caseworkers in his proposed budget, we are taking a significant step forward. But there is no one who thinks our work ends there. Over the coming weeks and months, we are committed to increasing our capacity even further, conducting a comprehensive review of the entirety of our work to understand where we come up short, and being fully transparent with the public as to the steps we are taking. This will not be quick or easy, and many of the challenges we face are longstanding and entrenched, but everyone in this administration is deeply committed to overcoming them and providing the care that our vulnerable children and families truly deserve.”

Family

- Ja’hir Gibbons, age 2 at time of death
- Half-brother of Ja’hir, age 5 (“Brother”)
- Mother of Ja’hir (“Mother”)
- Boyfriend of Mother (“Boyfriend”)
- Half-brother of Ja’hir, age 6 (“Oldest Brother”)
- Half-sister of Ja’hir, age 9 (“Sister”)

NOTE: The information included below reflects the department’s current understanding of records, reports, and documents available to us at this time. Our investigation remains ongoing and we will continue to be transparent as we move forward.

Previous History

The Department’s first interaction with this family began in 2010, prior to Ja’hir’s birth. Ja’hir’s mother had two children, a sister and oldest brother, in 2010 and 2013, who are half siblings of Ja’hir. From 2010-2013, DCFS received four allegations of inadequate supervision or risk of physical and environmental injury. DCFS investigated all four allegations. Three were unfounded. One was appealed by the mother and later ruled unfounded by an administrative judge.

During this time, the court granted DCFS temporary custody of the sister in October of 2010 and temporary custody of the oldest brother in June of 2012. In both cases, the children became court involved very close to their births and did not return to the care of their mother. The children were ultimately adopted.

In May of 2013, the brother was born, and the court granted DCFS temporary custody. He was placed in a foster home. In June of 2015, the court returned the brother to the care of his mother, and he remained in her care at the time of Ja'hir's death. This closed out DCFS involvement with this family until November of 2017.

Ja'hir Timeline

- 11/16/17 DCFS received a report related to the brother and Ja'hir Gibbons. The individual who made the report stated she observed the mother and her boyfriend bagging up marijuana and cocaine and selling it out of the home during the prior week. The reporter stated she also witnessed the mother slap and choke the brother, who was 4-years old at this time.
- 11/16/17 A DCFS investigator was assigned and made an unannounced visit, but was not allowed entry to the home. The mother did allow the investigator to see the children through the door. The brother was not wearing a shirt and showed no visible marks. The investigator observed Ja'hir and saw no visible marks.
- 12/15/17 The Investigator met with the maternal grandmother at her home. This is where the mother was staying with the children at this time. The investigator found the home to be appropriate.
- 12/18/17 The investigator met with Ja'hir in DCFS offices with the mother. The investigator did not observe any marks or bruises. The investigator spoke with the brother and the brother said he felt safe and happy with his mother and that they are living with the maternal grandmother.
- 01/08/18 The investigator spoke with the nurse practitioner at their family medicine clinic. Ja'hir and his brother were seen in June of 2017 for well child visits and there were no medical concerns.
- 1/11/18 The investigation was closed and ruled unfounded.
- 5/24/18 DCFS received a report regarding Ja'hir and his brother. The report alleged a domestic violence incident occurred between the mother and father of the oldest brother in front of Ja'hir and his brother.
- 5/31/18 The investigator conducted a home visit and observed Ja'hir and his brother to be clean with no bruises marks or welts.
- 7/16/18 The investigator conducted a visit at the shelter where the mother, Ja'hir and his brother were living at the time. The investigator did not observe any visible marks, bruises or injuries on him.
- 7/18/18 The investigation was closed and ruled unfounded.
- 10/19/18 DCFS received a report regarding abuse to Ja'hir. The report alleges cuts, welts, abrasions and oral Injuries to Ja'hir by the mother's boyfriend. Ja'hir is taken to Comer Hospital. The investigator and medical staff observed the buttock area of Ja'hir at the hospital and the marks were no longer there. Due to continued concerns as to the safety of the home, DCFS asked and the mother agreed to a safety plan for Ja'hir and the brother that placed both children at a Safe Families home pending an investigation. Safe Family home is a voluntary agreement with the family and the provider who step in to monitor families until there are no safety concerns.

- 10/29/18 Ja'hir and the brother remain in a Safe Families Home. The investigator offered Intact Family Services, provided by Omni Youth Services, to the mother and explained what these services would entail. The mother agreed to receive these services.
- 11/05/18 The investigator and the intact services worker met with the mother to offer services.
- 11/14/18 The intact worker met with the mother and began a clinical assessment with the mother. The intact worker spoke with the mother about the brother's fear of going back home because of an incident when the mother's boyfriend had shaken him.
- 11/19/18 The investigator met with the boyfriend and informed him of the investigation. The boyfriend denied hitting Ja'hir and said he would never discipline the children.
- 11/21/18 The intact worker met with the mother and offered counseling for the brother and early intervention services for Ja'hir. The intact worker also requested that the mother obtain a new order of protection against the boyfriend.
- 11/21/18 DCFS received a report that both children appear to be experiencing some trauma in the Safe Families home as to a prior domestic violence incident with the father of the oldest brother.
- 11/21/18 The intact worker observes Ja'hir and his brother at Safe Families home.
- 11/21/18 During the ongoing investigation, a report was received regarding a past incident when the mother and the boyfriend were fighting while the children were in the home.
- 11/27/18 Intact worker observes Ja'hir and his brother at Safe Families home.
- 11/28/18 Intact worker observes Ja'hir and his brother at Safe Families home.
- 11/30/18 The investigator spoke with the mother in regard to the domestic violence report from 11/21/18 and the mother denied contact with her former live-in boyfriend.
- 12/3/18 The intact worker observed Ja'hir and his brother at Safe Families home.
- 12/6/19 Pursuant to the child endangerment risk assessment protocol, the intact worker determined the home to be safe and ended the safety plan established on 10/19/18. Ja'hir and his brother were returned home to the mother, and Ja'hir's brother was enrolled in school.
- 12/11/18 The intact worker observes Ja'hir and his brother at home with their mother. The intact worker provided the mother with information for Ja'hir regarding the DCFS 0-3 program, an assessment program for our youngest children to ensure they are reaching age appropriate milestones.

- 12/18/18 The investigation is closed and ruled unfounded. Intact services continue.
- 12/19/18 The intact worker observes Ja'hir and his brother at home with their mother. No concerns were reported.
- 01/11/19 The intact worker conducted a home visit and observed Ja'hir and his brother at home with the mother. Early Intervention services are in place for Ja'hir and the brother is to begin play therapy.
- 01/29/19 The intact worker conducted a home visit and observed Ja'hir and his brother at home with their mother. No concerns were reported.
- 02/11/19 The intact worker conducted a home visit and observed Ja'hir and his brother at home with their mother. The mother has been in attendance and participating in therapy that continues to focus on her trauma from her past history of domestic violence.
- 02/28/19 The intact worker conducted a home visit and observed Ja'hir and his brother at home with their mother. The children were reported to be showing no signs of abuse or neglect. The home presented with no environmental concerns and continued to have working smoke detectors. There was an adequate amount of food in the fridge and cabinets. No reports of domestic violence have been reported.
- 03/06/19 The intact worker conducted a home visit and observed Ja'hir and his brother at home with their mother. The children showed no signs of abuse or neglect
- 03/09/19 The intact worker conducted a home visit and observed Ja'hir and his brother at home with their mother. The brother had missed two therapy appointments at this point, which the mother attributed to her work schedule.
- 03/16/19 The intact worker conducted a home visit.
- NOTE: There were two reports submitted for this visit. On March 17 at 9:37 a.m., a report was submitted that both children were safe at the home on March 16th at 12:30 p.m. Following Ja'hir's death, a second report was submitted on March 19 at 10:20 a.m. that only one child, Ja'hir's brother, was home on March 16th at 12:45 p.m. The mother states Ja'hir was at his godmother's home and she was on her way to pick him up. Services remain in place for both the children and the mother.
- 03/18/19 DCFS received a report on the death of Ja'hir. Protective custody is taken of Ja'hir's brother and he is placed in a foster home pending the investigation. The mother and the boyfriend were both arrested and remain in police custody.

DCFS is currently conducting a full investigation into the death of Ja'hir and how and why it took place and will be fully cooperating with law enforcement in this process. DCFS is also conducting a full investigation into the caseworker responsible for the March 16, 2019 home visit and if records were falsified, DCFS will pursue all available discipline, including termination.