

**OKLAHOMA COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH  
OFFICE OF JUVENILE SYSTEM OVERSIGHT**

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**Report Release Date: August 28, 2007**

**Review of the Death of Keenan Taylor  
of Tulsa County, Oklahoma**

**Dates and Outcome of Investigations and Actions Taken by the  
Department of Human Services; Actions Taken by the District  
Attorney; and Dates and Summary of Judicial Proceedings and  
Rulings of the Court**

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**General Information**

On July 3, 2007, the Office of Juvenile System Oversight (OJSO) received a request for a public report regarding the death of a child, Keenan Taylor. The death occurred on June 9, 2005. Criminal felony child neglect and first degree murder charges were filed on the child's father, Carlis Anthony Ball, on June 14, 2005. Mr. Ball was convicted by a jury of first degree murder and child neglect on March 27, 2006. The following is a summary of the actions taken by the Department of Human Services (DHS); the actions taken by the district attorney; judicial proceedings; and the rulings of the court, as authorized by 10 O.S., Section 7005-1.9, D and E (below).

**Authorization**

Title 10, Section 7005-1.9, D and E, of the Oklahoma Statutes, states:

D. 1. At any time subsequent to seven (7) days, but no more than thirty (30) days, of the date the person responsible for the child has been criminally charged, the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth shall, upon request, release certain information to the public as follows:

a. a confirmation shall be provided by the Commission as to whether a report of suspected child abuse or neglect has been made concerning the alleged victim or other children while living in the same household and whether an investigation has begun,

b. confirmation shall be provided by the Commission as to whether previous reports of suspected child abuse or neglect have been made and the dates thereof, a summary of those previous reports, the dates and outcome of any investigations or actions taken by the Department [DHS] and the Commission in response to any previous report of child abuse or neglect, and the specific

recommendation made to the district attorney and any subsequent action taken by the district attorney,

c. the dates of any judicial proceedings prior to the death or near death of the child,

d. recommendations submitted by the Department [DHS] and the Commission shall be provided in writing including recommendations made at the hearing as they relate to custody or placement of a child, and

e. the rulings of the court.

2. Specific recommendations made by the Commission described in any progress reports of a pending case submitted to the court may be disclosed by the Commission.

E. Any disclosure of information pursuant to this section shall not identify or provide an identifying description of any complainant or reporter of child abuse or neglect, and shall not identify the name of the child victim's siblings or other children living in the same household, the parent or other person responsible for the child or any other member of the household, other than the person criminally charged.

**Identifiers:**

Child's name: Keenan Taylor

Date of Birth: June 18, 2002

Biological Father: Carlis Anthony Ball

Siblings: Half sibling 1 (dob 2/07/93)  
Half sibling 2 (dob 9/06/94)  
Half sibling 3 (dob 9/16/97)  
Half sibling 4 (dob 6/16/99)  
Half sibling 5 (dob 12/27/00)  
Half sibling 6 (dob 12/15/04)

The Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth did not become aware of this case until after the child's death.

**Summary of Actions Taken by the Department of Human Services; Action Taken by the District Attorney; Judicial Proceedings; and the Rulings of the Court:**

The OJSO reviewed the child welfare history on the family prior to the child's death. The DHS documented six referrals regarding Keenan's biological mother and nine referrals regarding Keenan's biological father.

### Referral 1 (May 25, 1995)

The DHS received the first referral regarding the mother on May 25, 1995, alleging she had slapped a child in the face with her hand. There was limited information available on this referral because the investigation pre-dated the child welfare KIDS computer system. DHS determined that the mother's action did not meet the definition of abuse, as defined in DHS policy. According to DHS documentation, the child had no injuries from the incident. The overall finding of the investigation was that DHS was unable to locate the family.

### Referral 2 (December 18, 1995)

The DHS received a referral on December 18, 1995, regarding the mother and the family, alleging the biological mother left a two-year-old child (Child 1) alone in a car parking lot in 19-degree weather. An off-duty police officer working security for the store observed the child screaming and crying. He took the child inside and called for a patrol unit. The mother showed up and stated the child had been sick and that she did not think she would be gone that long. Police returned the child to the mother and advised a report would be made to DHS Child Welfare Services.

The referral was assigned as a Priority III investigation, to be initiated within thirty days. The DHS worker observed Child 1 and Child 2 in the home on January 30, 1996, thirteen days past the Priority III timeframe for making contact. The worker documented that Child 2 was not interviewed due to the child's age; the worker did not document why Child 1 was not interviewed. The mother was interviewed on February 2, 1996, sixteen days past the Priority III timeframe for making contact. According to documentation, the mother denied that she had placed her child in danger. DHS documentation did not indicate attempts were made to interview the child's biological father. The DHS documented that collateral interviews were not conducted; a minimum of two collateral witnesses were to be contacted, according to DHS policy. A finding of Confirmed and a recommendation for counseling were made. The DHS documented that the mother was unwilling to accept responsibility, that she had placed the child in danger and that the outcome could have been life-threatening. DHS did not document any past child welfare history on the mother, even though there was a prior referral dated May 25, 1995.

### Referral 3 (March 4, 1996)

The DHS received a referral regarding the mother and the family on March 4, 1996, alleging the whereabouts of the three-year-old child (Child 1) were unknown. The DHS documentation indicated the mother failed (allegedly) to pick the child up from preschool, and he was placed in a children's emergency shelter.

The referral was assigned as a Priority I investigation and was initiated on March 4, 1996; however, the only documentation regarding a child interview was in reference to a

previous referral (December 18, 1995) in the KIDS system. The DHS documented in the KIDS system an interview with the mother; however, there were no details regarding the interview. Documentation did not indicate DHS attempted to contact the absent parent or collateral witnesses for interviews. The DHS made a confirmed finding of Neglect, because the mother had not picked the child up from pre-school. No other action was taken by the DHS.

#### Referral 4 (August 13, 1996)

The DHS received a referral on August 13, 1996, regarding the mother and the family, alleging:

- the biological mother was not taking appropriate care of the then four-year-old child (Child 1);
- the biological mother was not taking the child to speech therapy;
- the child was not being provided adequate amounts of food;
- the child was observed in the street, walking alone, following behind his mother;
- the biological mother was involved in drug use; and
- the biological mother slept during the day for extended periods of time.

The referral was assigned as a Priority II investigation, to be initiated within fifteen days. The DHS made an initial attempt to conduct an interview with the child victim within the required timeframe. The DHS documented in the summary and recommendations section of the Report to the District Attorney that the worker attempted to conduct two home visits (both were unsuccessful), left contact letters at the home, and spoke to a neighbor who advised no one lived there. The DHS documented a finding of Unable to Locate the family. The DHS case file contained a memorandum, dated September 16, authored by a county director for Tulsa County Child Welfare Services, that, in part, stated, "Due to the current critical situation, regarding back log child welfare investigations, in Tulsa county, some shortcuts in documentation may have been taken regarding this investigation. It is unfortunate that this situation exists and we apologize to workers who may be conducting future investigations pertaining to this family."

#### Referral 5 (January 28, 2001)

The DHS received a referral regarding Mr. Ball and his girlfriend on January 28, 2001. Mr. Ball's girlfriend was the biological mother to three of his children (Child 3, Child 4, and Child 5). It was alleged the girlfriend had delivered a baby (Child 5), at 30 to 32 weeks gestation, on December 27, 2000, with a birth weight of 3 pounds, 10 ounces. Child 5 had been in the neonatal intensive care unit since birth and was on a ventilator for one week. The child was only able to tolerate 2 ounces of formula every three hours. The child would require special care. The police arrested the father at the hospital for past outstanding warrants, but he was released from police custody the following day. The child suffered from a heart condition and the mother, allegedly, left the child at the hospital and seldom visited the child while the child was hospitalized.

The referral was assigned as a Priority II investigation, to be initiated within five days. A DHS supervisor recommended that the referral be responded to as a Priority I investigation (to be initiated within twenty-four hours). The worker documented the child was not observed by the worker until February 2, 2001, one day past the Priority II timeframe for making contact. The child was placed into DHS emergency custody on February 2, 2001, due to the child being ready for discharge from the hospital and the mother could not be located.

On February 6, 2001, DHS interviewed the mother and she denied the allegations, stating that she could not find transportation to the hospital and that she had been sick. Documentation did not indicate the DHS attempted to contact the child's father for an interview. On February 9, 2001, the child was released in the mother's custody. It was unclear who ordered the child released from DHS custody. A finding of Services Recommended was made. DHS documented that the case would remain open for one preventative follow-up visit; documentation indicated the worker made contact with the family on May 4, 2001.

#### Referral 6 (January 21, 2003)

The DHS received a referral regarding the mother and the family on January 21, 2003, alleging:

- the biological mother was involved in drug use;
- the children (Child 1, Child 2, and Keenan) stayed at home alone or were left in the care of the biological mother's eighty-nine-year-old grandmother who used a walker; and
- Child 2 was not attending school, due to the mother moving the family from place-to-place.

The referral was assigned as a Priority II investigation, to be initiated within fifteen days. The child welfare worker conducted interviews on March 6, 2003, thirty days past the Priority II timeframe for making contact. The mother and the children denied the allegations. The children reported an aunt watched them when their mother was gone. Documentation did not indicate the DHS attempted to interview the absent father(s). The only documented contact was a collateral interview; a person who was presently living with the mother. Documentation did not indicate that a case staffing took place between the worker and the supervisor, since the DHS had received multiple referrals regarding the family. The DHS made a finding of Services Not Needed.

#### Referral 7 (January 19, 2004)

The DHS received a referral on January 19, 2004, regarding Mr. Ball's children, ages six (Child 3) and four (Child 4). The reporter alleged the boys were sent to school in filthy clothes and smelled of a bad odor. Reportedly, the six-year-old child (Child 3) had not attended school prior to this time. The reporter alleged that the six-year-old stated his father had abducted him and he had just been returned to his mother. Reportedly,

the child had difficulty focusing on his school work and he “zones out.” The reporter stated that both boys “wolf down their food.” Reportedly, Mr. Ball did not live in the home. The DHS screened out the allegations without investigation, stating the allegations were not considered child abuse or neglect.

#### Referral 8 (September 3, 2004)

The DHS received a referral on September 3, 2004, regarding Mr. Ball and his children, ages seven (Child 3), five (Child 4), and three (Child 5), and a friend’s six-month-old baby. Allegedly, the children had been left home alone since September 2, 2004. The Tulsa police department placed the children into protective custody and transported them to a children’s emergency shelter.

The DHS assigned the referral as a Priority I investigation. The worker made contact with all four children within the required timeframe. DHS documentation did not list Mr. Ball as an absent parent, nor did documentation indicate that DHS attempted to conduct an interview with him. The DHS made a finding of Services Not Needed, because the allegation was not substantiated. The DHS documented that the mother reportedly left the children in the care of her sixteen-year-old cousin, who, in turn, left the children in the home alone. According to DHS documentation, after they completed their investigation, the assistant district attorney allowed the DHS worker to return the children to the mother on September 8, 2004, stating there was no evidence to indicate the mother intentionally left the children unsupervised. DHS documented that the mother was instructed to obtain responsible caretakers in the future.

#### Referral 9 (December 16, 2004)

The DHS received a referral regarding the mother and the family on December 16, 2004, alleging:

- a newborn child (Child 6) had tested positive for exposure to drugs; and
- the biological mother had admitted she smoked marijuana and she had tested positive for marijuana and cocaine.

The referral was assigned as a Priority I investigation. The DHS made contact with Child 6 in the hospital and the mother within the required timeframe for a Priority I investigation. Contact with Keenan was 8 hours past the Priority I timeframe. Documentation stated that Child 2 was out-of-state and unavailable for an interview and that Child 1 was staying with family, but that he was later interviewed. Documentation indicated one absent parent was not contacted for an interview. Mr. Ball was listed as a collateral witness. The worker investigated the allegations and made a finding of Confirmed-Court Intervention Requested regarding Child 1 and Child 6. They were placed into DHS Emergency Custody on December 17, 2004; Keenan was also placed into emergency custody on December 17, 2004. The DHS worker submitted an affidavit on December 17, 2004, to the Tulsa County Juvenile Division of the district court, alleging Keenan, Child 1, and Child 2 were deprived. According to a DHS case contact

note, dated December 21, 2004, a court hearing was held on the same day and the court granted authority to release the children to their biological fathers.

On December 23, 2004, Keenan was placed with his non-custodial biological father, Carlis Anthony Ball, who was caring for three other biological children. File documentation indicated the biological father had planned to apply for emergency custody of Keenan, and the mother had agreed for the child to remain in the father's home. The deprived court proceedings did not mention Keenan after this time.

#### Referral 10 (February 25, 2005)

The DHS received a referral regarding the family on February 25, 2005, alleging:

- The child (Child 4) came to school smelling like urine. He was filthy and had a ring worm.
- The mother had not been cooperative.
- The child reported he has not been getting to eat breakfast.

DHS screened-out the referral without investigation. Documentation stated the allegations were not considered child abuse or neglect.

A DHS case note documented that the children's permanency worker was contacted on April 4, 2005, and told that the father "whipped 2 year old Keenan for wetting his pants." Documentation did not indicate the permanency worker entered a child abuse referral for investigation regarding the allegation.

#### Referral 11 (May 3, 2005)

The DHS received a referral on May 3, 2005, regarding the biological father and the family, alleging:

- Two-year-old Keenan had belt marks and bruises on his legs. The date and time of the reporter's observation of the bruises were listed as unknown. The child was currently living with his biological father.

The referral was assigned as a Priority II investigation, to be initiated within fifteen days. The DHS case documentation indicated that everyone in the household was contacted within the required timeframe; however, DHS did not document that attempts were made to interview the biological mother and two of the biological fathers. The referral was pending at the time of Keenan's death. (See chronological entries of June 10, 2005, and July 30, 2005.)

#### May 20, 2005

A DHS case note in the file stated the children's permanency worker was contacted on May 20, 2005, and was told of mistreatment of Keenan at his biological father's home.

Documentation did not indicate the permanency worker entered a child abuse referral for investigation regarding the allegation. The permanency worker resigned from DHS employment on August 30, 2005.

#### Referral 12 (May 24, 2005)

The DHS received a referral on May 24, 2005, regarding the biological father and the family, alleging:

- The home smelled of urine.
- The children (Child 3, Child 4, Child 5, and Keenan) were not bathed regularly and frequently wore dirty clothes.
- Approximately a year earlier, Keenan had a black eye and a sore on the top of his head. The area around the child's eye was still discolored.
- Keenan had a severe diaper rash and open sores on his legs that looked like ringworms. Reportedly, the sores were caused from the child lying on urine-soaked materials.
- The other children in the home had open sores on their legs, possibly caused from lying on urine-soaked materials.
- The biological father had whipped Keenan with a belt approximately a week earlier and the child still had a dark mark on his buttocks.
- Keenan was always hungry and thirsty.

The referral was assigned as a Priority I investigation on May 24, 2005. KIDS documentation indicated the referral was received a day after the worker had visited the home on May 23, 2005 (however, see chronological entry of June 10, 2005), because the DHS had received similar allegations in the previous referral dated May 3, 2005. The worker documented that he staffed the referral with his supervisor. Documentation indicated the worker had explained to his supervisor that the household was appropriate and clean, the children showed no signs of abuse or neglect, and there were no observations of drug paraphernalia or containers of alcohol. According to documentation, there was adequate food and the utilities were operational. The worker documented that he reported to his supervisor there were no issues present that would lead the worker to believe the children were at-risk. The documentation indicated the worker was told by the supervisor to document his information on a new referral; the referral was connected to the referral dated May 3, 2005. The worker documented that at the time, he did not believe the children were at-risk in the home and he had not confirmed the allegations. DHS documentation indicated the worker put an initial interview date of May 24, 2005, on the computer. However, the worker documented that the children were actually seen on May 23, 2005, the day before the referral was received. DHS documentation indicated the DHS did not initiate the referral as a Priority I investigation. The worker documented contacting the biological father, Child 3, Child 4, Child 5, and Keenan; there was no documentation to indicate the worker contacted or attempted to contact collateral witnesses and the other absent parents for interviews. The worker did not document that a medical consultation was obtained to



determine the injuries alleged in the referral of May 24, 2005. The referral was pending at the time of Keenan's death.

#### Referral 13 (May 25, 2005)

The DHS received a referral on May 25, 2005, regarding the father and Keenan. The reporter expressed concern for Keenan's welfare and alleged:

- Keenan had a black eye. Reportedly, the child disclosed, "My daddy did it."
- Reportedly, the father stated in front of the other children in the room that the injury was caused accidentally.
- The biological father was smoking marijuana all the time.
- It was suspected the biological father was using other drugs. Reportedly, the father had been seen with a rolled-up dollar bill that had a white substance on it.
- Keenan had a busted lip.

The DHS screened-out the referral, due to an open referral with the same injuries already reported.

#### Referral 14 (June 7, 2005)

The DHS received a referral on June 7, 2005, regarding the father and children, alleging:

- The children were dirty and smelled of urine.
- When the reporter visited the home on May 26, 2005, the father stated that he had a court date at 2:00 p.m. and the reporter was unable to see inside the home.

The DHS screened-out the referral without investigation. The DHS documented that the allegations were not child abuse or neglect.

#### Referral 15 (June 9, 2005)

The DHS received a referral on June 9, 2005, reporting that two-year-old Keenan had died. The KIDS system documentation of the incident indicated:

- the father had been cooking, when Keenan walked up from behind and startled the father, resulting in the child being scalded with boiling water;
- the father wrapped up the child and placed him in the closet;
- the child would not stop crying;
- the father took the child out of the closet and put ice around him;
- the child later died; and
- the father told a friend that he had heated water to 500 degrees to manufacture drugs and had spilled the water on Keenan, killing him.

The referral was assigned as a Priority I investigation and was initiated within the required timeframe. The DHS conducted an investigation and documented:

- the deceased child, Keenan, had other injuries on his body that were at various stages of healing;
- two older children (Child 3 and Child 4) were examined and a pattern of marks were found on their bodies that were consistent with abuse and neglect;
- the children were developmentally delayed; and
- Child 4 had ringworms on his head and body.

The DHS made a finding of Confirmed-Court Intervention Requested on the allegations of Threat of Harm, Failure to Protect, and Child Death. The DHS requested the district attorney's office to petition the court to adjudicate the remaining children in the home (Child 3, Child 4, and Child 5) as deprived. The DHS recommended immediate termination of the father's parental rights, due to the shocking and heinous nature of the abuse.

The district attorney filed a petition on June 24, 2005, requesting immediate termination of Carlis Anthony Ball's parental rights to all three children. The father subsequently relinquished his parental rights on February 27, 2006.

#### June 10, 2005

As a response to Keenan's death, the DHS County Director instructed the intake supervisor to review and discuss the investigative protocol and the intake worker's actions regarding the May 2005 pending referrals. Following a discussion, the supervisor determined the worker had difficulty in locating the case notes and could not recall specific information about the investigation. The supervisor checked with people who were reportedly interviewed by the intake worker and determined that the worker never interviewed certain key people. It remains unknown as to whether Keenan was interviewed or observed by the intake worker.

The intake worker submitted an investigative report to the supervisor, at which time the supervisor called into question the inaccuracy of the information. The worker resigned from employment with the DHS on July 15, 2005.

#### July 30, 2005

An addendum to the Report to the District Attorney, dated July 30, 2005, stated:

The above interviews/summary information was documented by worker, [name withheld]. He has since resigned, and the info has been found to be inaccurate. This Supervisor, [name withheld], changed [worker's name withheld] findings from Services not Needed to, Confirm-Court Intervention Requested, based on the new referral received by the Justice Center on 6-9-05, [referral # withheld] in which the children were taken into custody and a Petition was filed. For historical documentation, however, this Supervisor did not want to change the info entered by [worker's name withheld], but did want to close the referral out to prevent it

from going into backlog status. As no direction has been given to this Supervisor by [county director's name withheld] or area Director, as to what to do with this 2 month old referral, [supervisor's name withheld] has decided that a written report will be produced and placed in the file, but he (worker) will not sign it. The same thing has been done with the companion referral to this referral, [number withheld].

On July 30, 2005, the DHS made a finding of Confirmed-Court Intervention Requested as to the May 2005 referrals and investigations.