

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

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**Report Release Date: November 16, 2009**

**Review of the Death of Rachel Lambert  
of Oklahoma County, Oklahoma**

Dates and Outcome of Investigations and Actions Taken by the Oklahoma 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 June 16, 2009, the Office of Juvenile System Oversight (OJSO) received an inquiry regarding the death of Rachel M'Shale Lambert, a six-month-old child. The child's biological father initially claimed that he had laid Rachel down for bed about 9:00 p.m. and that when he checked on the child at 4:30 a.m., she had stopped breathing. According to the father, he called 911 at that time. On June 26, 2009, the district attorney's office filed a criminal felony charge, HMII, Murder-First Degree, against Willis J. Lambert, Jr., the child's biological father. Also on June 26, 2009, the district attorney's office filed a criminal felony charge, HMII, Murder-First Degree, or in the alternative, enabling child abuse, against Latrice Sheron Russell, the child's biological mother.

The following is a summary of the actions taken by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS); the actions taken by the district attorney; judicial proceedings; and the rulings of the court, as authorized by 10A O.S., Section 1-6-105, B, D, and E (below).

**Authorization**

Title 10A, Section 1-6-105, B, D and E, of the Oklahoma Statutes, states:

B. When a person responsible for a child has been charged by information or indictment with committing a crime resulting in the death or near death of the child, there shall be a presumption that the best interest of the public is served by public disclosure of certain information concerning:

1. The circumstances of the investigation of the death or near death of the child; and
2. Any other investigations concerning that child, or other children while living in the same household, within:

- a. three (3) years of the death or near-death, and
- b. one (1) year after the death or near-death.

D. 1. At any time subsequent to seven (7) days after 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 within sixty (60) days of the request 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 [OKDHS] 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 [OKDHS] 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: Rachel M'Shale Lambert  
Date of birth: December 3, 2008  
Date of death: June 9, 2009

Alleged Perpetrators: Willis J. Lambert, Jr.  
Latrice Sheron Russell

Siblings: Child 2, this child and Rachel Lambert have the same biological mother but different biological fathers  
Date of birth: January 4, 1996

Child 3, this child and Rachel Lambert have the same biological parents  
Date of birth: March 10, 1998

The Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY) became aware of this case on June 16, 2009, a week after the child had died. At that time, a complaint was received by the OCCY reporting that Willis J. Lambert, Jr. had been arrested in connection with the death of his six-month-old daughter, just fourteen months after Lambert had been released from prison due to a previous child abuse conviction. Lambert had pleaded guilty to the charge ten years earlier when he had abused his then two-month-old child (Child 3). The two other children were removed from the home after the death of Rachel.

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

[Title 10A, Section 1-6-105, B, of the Oklahoma Statutes, authorizes the disclosure of information concerning the circumstances of the investigation of a child's death within three years of the death; therefore, the information provided below is within the three-year time period.]

**First Report Alleging Abuse/Neglect Received by the OKDHS (June 9, 2009)**

The OKDHS received a report on June 9, 2009, regarding Rachel Lambert. According to the reporter, Rachel had died and two other siblings remained in the home. The OKDHS received minimal information from the reporter's initial call; the reporter called the OKDHS a second time and stated that the two other children in the home had been placed in protective custody. The caller alleged possible alcohol abuse and marijuana use in the home. The reporter stated that Lambert had been released from prison in 2008, after serving a sentence for child abuse when he allegedly admitted that he had attempted to kill Child 3 when the child was two months old. Reportedly, Child 3's injuries were a spiral fracture, a broken collar bone, and a black eye, all allegedly

inflicted by Willis J. Lambert, Jr. The reporter stated that Lambert's parental rights had been terminated as to Child 3, but that the mother had allowed Lambert to move back into the home after his release from prison.

The OKDHS accepted the report as a Priority I investigation to be initiated within one day. The OKDHS documentation indicated that the investigation was initiated on June 9, 2009.

The OKDHS overall finding of the allegations was Confirmed-Court Intervention Requested. Those interviewed during the investigation were Rachel's biological parents, Latrice Russell and Willis J. Lambert, Jr.; Child 2's biological father; nine collateral witnesses; Child 2; and Child 3. The OKDHS documented the following statements during one of the surviving children's interview:

- Will (Willis J. Lambert, Jr.) was learning how to be appropriate with Rachel.
- Will was learning how to hold Rachel without "freaking out".
- Will would sometimes get nervous and freak out when holding Rachel.
- Will would get mad or frustrated because he did not know how to do it.

The OKDHS documented that Child 2 and Child 3 had indicated that their mother and Lambert both gave "whooping[s]" to Child 3, but that only their mother gave "whooping[s]" to Child 2.

#### Protective Custody of Surviving Siblings (June 9, 2009)

OKDHS documentation indicated that Child 2 and Child 3 were placed in protective custody by law enforcement on June 9, 2009.

#### OKDHS Foster Home Placement of Surviving Siblings (June 9, 2009)

OKDHS documentation indicated that Child 2 and Child 3 were placed in a foster home on June 9, 2009, and remained in the foster home until June 18, 2009.

#### Law Enforcement Interview with Alleged Perpetrator (June 10, 2009)

The OKDHS documented that law enforcement interviewed Lambert on June 10, 2009, and that Lambert had confessed to law enforcement that he had shaken Rachel when he became mad because Rachel would not be still while he tried to dress her in a onesie (one-piece baby garment).

#### Emergency Custody Hearing (June 11, 2009)

A district court judge issued an order to place Child 2 and Child 3 in the temporary emergency custody of OKDHS. The next hearing was scheduled for June 18, 2009.

#### Petition to Terminate Parental Rights (June 16, 2009)

On June 16, 2009, the district attorney's office filed a petition to request that Child 2 and Child 3 be adjudicated as deprived as to their mother and to request that the mother's parental rights be terminated as to both children.

The petition also addressed Willis J. Lambert, Jr. as to Child 3. The supporting documentation stated that Lambert had not provided the proper parental care and guardianship necessary for Child 3's physical safety and mental well being.

OKDHS documentation indicated that on June 18, 2009, Lambert informed the court that he would obtain legal representation. On that same date, a public defender was appointed for Russell. The next hearing was scheduled for June 29, 2009.

#### Kinship Foster Care Placement (June 18, 2009)

The OKDHS documented that Child 2 and Child 3 were placed in a kinship foster home on June 18, 2009.

#### Assessment of Child Safety (June 23, 2009)

The OKDHS conducted an assessment regarding the safety of the children in their biological mother's home. Those involved in the assessment were Latrice Russell, Willis J. Lambert, Jr., Child 2's biological father, Child 2's paternal grandmother, two police detectives, the OKDHS worker, and the placement provider. The OKDHS determined that it was unsafe for Child 2 and Child 3 to remain in their mother's biological home.

#### Child Abuse Charges Filed (June 26, 2009)

A criminal felony charge, HMII, Murder—First Degree, was filed against Willis J. Lambert, Jr., the biological father of Rachel Lambert.

A criminal felony charge, HMII, Murder—First Degree, or in the alternative, enabling child abuse, was filed against Latrice Sheron Russell, the biological mother of Rachel Lambert.

#### Court Hearing (September 14, 2009)

The court hearing scheduled for June 29, 2009, was set over, pending the criminal case regarding Latrice Russell scheduled for August 27, 2009. A pretrial court hearing was scheduled for September 14, 2009. OKDHS documentation did not document any further information regarding court hearings.