

## REVIEW OF THE DEATH OF CALEB HOLDEN JENNINGS SEMINOLE COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

Report Release Date: January 23, 2025

### OVERVIEW

On July 29, 2022, the Seminole County District Attorney formally charged the biological father, Chad Holden Jennings, with the felony offense of First-Degree Murder in connection with child abuse.

On July 29, 2022, the Seminole County District Attorney formally charged the girlfriend of the biological father, Katherine Louise Penner, with the felony offense of First-Degree Murder in connection with child abuse.

On November 29, 2023, Katherine Louise Penner was sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment, with all but the first twenty years suspended, for the offenses of Child Abuse, Conspiracy, and Desecration of a Human Corpse.

On February 9, 2024, Chad Holden Jennings was sentenced to life imprisonment without the possibility of parole for the offense of Murder in the First Degree, ten years' imprisonment for Conspiracy, and seven years' imprisonment for Desecration of a Human Corpse.

### IDENTIFIERS

Child's Name:	Date of Birth:	Date of Death:
Caleb Holden Jennings	November 9, 2018	Unknown
Person Responsible for Child (PRFC):	Additional Identifiers:	
Chad Holden Jennings Katherine Louise Penner	Sibling One: Eleven Years Old	

### ACTIONS

The release of the following summary of the actions taken by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) and the proceedings in the district court is authorized by 10A O.S. § 1-6-105H.

The OJSO did not become aware of this case until after the death incident of Caleb Holden Jennings.

### DEATH INCIDENT

On July 27, 2022, the OKDHS office in Seminole County received a report of the death of three-year-old Caleb Holden Jennings. Per documentation provided by OKDHS, on July 27, 2022, the Seminole County Police Department contacted OKDHS regarding a possible homicide of Caleb. It was reported to law enforcement by an anonymous individual that Chad Jennings had disclosed to that individual how he burned and buried Caleb.

OKDHS documented that law enforcement was informed Caleb had previously been in OKDHS foster care and requested the contact information of his former foster parents to ensure Caleb was not in their care before initiating a search for his body. Law enforcement subsequently confirmed that Caleb was not with the former

foster parents. Law enforcement wanted to make sure Caleb was not in the care of former foster parents before initiating a search for his body. Law enforcement confirmed that Caleb was not with the former foster parents.

OKDHS further documented that through the criminal investigation and with the assistance of the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation (OSBI), human remains were found at the location given by the father, consistent with the story given by the father. The OSBI located Caleb's remains in Seminole, Oklahoma.

- On July 27, 2022, the OKDHS accepted this report as a Priority I Investigation and initiated contact with the family on the same date.

## INVESTIGATION

The persons interviewed during the investigation included Caleb's biological parents, Caleb's father's girlfriend, law enforcement, medical professionals, and family relatives.

During an interview with law enforcement, OKDHS documented that Chad Jennings admitted he physically disciplined Caleb until Caleb collapsed and became unresponsive. The father stated he then splashed water on Caleb but did not call 911. The father then wrapped Caleb in a blanket and put his body in a closet in the home. After an undetermined amount of time, the father then took Caleb's body to some property in Seminole County belonging to his girlfriend's family and burned it. The father stated he buried the bones that didn't burn. It is unclear the exact date Caleb was murdered.

OKDHS further documented that during an interview with law enforcement, Kathrine Penner admitted that Chad Jennings began physically disciplining Caleb around the age of two years old. Katherine stated Chad would hit Caleb all over his body, including his head. Katherine stated at the time of death, the child had bruising to his stomach, and after the child would not wake up, Chad wrapped the child in a blanket and put him in the closet for several days. Chad then took the child out and burned him. Katherine was unaware if the child was buried, as Chad reported, as she was not present for this part.

On July 27, 2022, the Oklahoma Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) forensic anthropologist assisted with the recovery of thermally altered skeletal remains of a young child in Seminole County.

On July 29, 2022, the Seminole County District Attorney's office filed four felony counts against Chad Jennings and four felony counts against Kathrine Penner.

On July 30, 2022, a sealed bucket containing additional remains was recovered from the same property.

On August 24, 2023, the Medical Examiner's (ME) report documented the probable cause of death as undetermined and the manner of death as unknown. Given the skeletal nature of the decedent's remains, a full anthropology examination was conducted. The anthropology examination of the remains concluded extensive thermal modification consistent with postmortem burning. Antemortem trauma to the face, cheek, and right hand was observed. These injuries collectively indicate at least three distinct phases of healing, consistent with non-accidental trauma occurring over a period of weeks to months before death. Perimortem trauma consistent with blunt force impacts to the right side of the face and upper chest is present.

- The OKDHS made a Substantiated Finding of Abuse/Death by Chad Jennings and Katherine Pinner to Caleb Holden Jennings.
- The OKDHS made a Substantiated Finding of Neglect/Threat of Harm by Chad Jennings and Katherine Pinner to Caleb Holden Jennings.
- The OKDHS did not recommend a deprived petition be filed on behalf of Sibling One as this child is in the custody of their biological mother.

## PRIOR INVOLVEMENT OF THE PRFC WITH OKLAHOMA DEPT. OF HUMAN SERVICES

The OJSO identified one pertinent report of child abuse before the death incident of three-year-old Caleb Holden Jennings.

### **Pertinent Report 1**

This report was received on November 14, 2018. The report stated the mother was using drugs while pregnant, and Caleb's cord blood came back positive for methamphetamines and amphetamines. The father, Chad Jennings, was in the home and suspected the mother's drug use. Caleb was placed into OKDHS custody on this date and placed in foster care. Caleb was reunited with his father, and the OKDHS case was dismissed on October 21, 2020.

- The OKDHS accepted the report as a Priority I Investigation with an initiation due date of November 14, 2018.
- The OKDHS made a Substantiated Finding as to the allegation of Neglect/Threat of Harm/Substance Abuse as to Caleb Holden Jennings by his biological parents.

## JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS PRIOR TO THE CHILD'S DEATH

The OJSO identified no relevant judicial proceedings prior to the death incident.