

Office of Juvenile System Oversight

REVIEW OF THE DEATH OF ISABELLA JOHNSON PAWNEE COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

Report Release Date: September 23, 2026

OVERVIEW

The Office of Juvenile System Oversight (OJSO) received a request to conduct a case review concerning the death of one-year-old Isabella Johnson.

On August 22, 2025, the biological mother, Kourtany Suzanna Johnson, and biological father, Christopher Paul Johnson, received two felony convictions of murder in the second degree and child neglect by the Pawnee County District Court.

IDENTIFIERS

Child's Name:	Date of Birth:	Date of Death:
Isabella Johnson	May 23, 2023	March 3, 2025
Person Responsible for Child (PRFC):	Additional Identifiers:	
Kourtany Suzanna Johnson (Biological Mother) Christopher Paul Johnson (Biological Father)	Sibling One: Ten Years Old Sibling Two: Three 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 Isabella Johnson.

DEATH INCIDENT

On March 3, 2025, the OKDHS office in Pawnee County received a child death report. At the time of the incident the family resided together, and Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson were the identified PRFCs in charge of caring for Isabella, Sibling One, and Sibling Two. The Pawnee County Sheriff's Office and Child Welfare Services (CWS) conducted a joint response investigation after Isabella was found unresponsive by both parents. The mother began cardiopulmonary resuscitation. It was reported that a suspected drug overdose resulted in Isabella's death. Isabella was pronounced dead at the scene when emergency crews arrived.

- OKDHS accepted the report as a Priority I Investigation.

INVESTIGATION

Persons interviewed during the investigation included the biological mother, Kourtany Suzanna Johnson; the biological father, Christopher Paul Johnson; Sibling One; Sibling Two; and various third parties.

CWS responded to the family's home after receiving a child death report. CWS arrived at the home and observed Isabella to be deceased with the medical examiner and law enforcement present. Isabella was observed to be extremely malodorous, with layers of thick black dirt caked onto the bottoms of her feet, unkempt hair, and food or other debris sticking to various places on her body. The home was observed to have animal feces throughout all rooms, rotten food in the refrigerator, no running water, no food, and unkempt piles of clutter spread throughout the home.

It was reported by law enforcement that, upon arriving at the home, the parents were screaming and acting erratically. When CWS arrived at the home, staff were unable to interview Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson because law enforcement confirmed they had already been arrested and taken to jail on felony charges of first-degree murder and child neglect. Sibling Two was not present at the scene because law enforcement had Sibling Two en route to be seen by a medical professional, and Sibling One was at school.

It was reported by law enforcement when CWS arrived at the home that Ms. Johnson and Mr. Johnson confirmed Isabella had gained access to Mr. Johnson's methadone and spilled the dose on herself the day prior, at around 11:30 a.m. Mr. Johnson reported he was getting ready to take the dose of methadone when he set it down, and when he turned around, Isabella spilled the dose on herself. Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson stated to law enforcement that Isabella went to sleep around 11:00 p.m. on Ms. Johnson's chest. It was reported that when they woke up the next morning, Isabella was not breathing, did not have a heartbeat, and they proceeded to call 911. CWS made an additional attempt to speak to Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson at the Pawnee County Jail, but law enforcement reported that they were not coherent enough to complete an interview.

CWS observed Sibling Two, but due to their development, they were non-verbal. Staff observed Sibling Two to be malodorous, dirty, and unkempt upon arriving at the hospital. A medical professional saw Sibling Two, and a full skeletal exam and wellness check were completed. Medical Professionals reported that Sibling Two was very dirty, malodorous, and had to be cleaned before the examination. Sibling Two's urinalysis came back negative for all substances and could be medically discharged.

Sibling One was interviewed at school by CWS. Sibling One reported that Ms. Johnson and Mr. Johnson talked about how Isabella drank methadone before Sibling One came home from church. Sibling One reported that methadone was a medicine Mr. Johnson drank to help him not be "toxic," but confirmed it made Mr. Johnson fall asleep and forget things.

Sibling One stated that Isabella was awake at 9:00 p.m. when Sibling One went to bed. Sibling One stated that, at 6:15 a.m., they got Isabella some milk because they usually got up together and recognized that Isabella was not breathing. Sibling One woke Ms. Johnson and Mr. Johnson, and both parents started yelling at each other and called 911.

Sibling One later reported to OKDHS that they did not tell the whole story because they feared getting into trouble for letting Isabella die. Sibling One stated that the only part not included in their interview was that Isabella had trouble breathing the prior day and that everyone checked on Isabella to make sure she was still breathing. Sibling One witnessed Ms. Johnson and Mr. Johnson trying to force-feed Isabella bread because they said it would soak up the methadone in Isabella's stomach.

CWS followed up with the Medical Examiner to confirm if there was any new information regarding the death of Isabella. The Medical Examiner reported that, based on the rigor and lividity of Isabella's body, they did not believe that Isabella had been deceased for only eight hours. The Medical Examiner stated that, based on prior experience and without further testing, they could confirm that Isabella had been deceased for 14 to 16 hours.

During the initial stage of the investigation, OKDHS determined Sibling One and Sibling Two crossed the safety threshold of being in imminent danger, and Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson had diminished protective capacities

to keep their children safe. OKDHS requested emergency custody of the surviving siblings, and the children were placed into foster care.

OKDHS attempted follow-up interviews with Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson at Pawnee County Jail. Mr. Johnson refused to speak to OKDHS. Ms. Johnson stated that Sibling One never found or saw Isabella's deceased body and that Sibling One was lying. Ms. Johnson was asked by OKDHS why she did not take Isabella to the hospital or call 911 when Isabella ingested the methadone, as she did for Sibling Two in a previous investigation. Ms. Johnson stated that she feared getting her children taken away by OKDHS because she grew up in the system and did not want that for her children. Ms. Johnson stated that Isabella had a heartbeat at 11:00 p.m. before she fell asleep. Ms. Johnson stated that she was done talking to OKDHS and returned to her cell.

Third party witnesses voiced concerns regarding the children's safety and well-being due to the condition of the home. Specifically, they stated that animal feces were visible throughout the residence and expressed concerns about the home's overall living conditions. Third-party witnesses reported being aware of Mr. Johnson being on methadone and witnessing methadone bottles lying within reach of the children when they had been to the family's home.

OKDHS received the Medical Examiner's report regarding the death of Isabella Johnson. The Medical Examiner's Report listed the manner of death as accident. The report indicated the probable cause of death as methadone toxicity.

- OKDHS made a Substantiated finding of Neglect/Inadequate or Dangerous Shelter by Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson to Sibling One, Sibling Two, and Isabella Johnson.
- OKDHS made a Substantiated finding of Neglect/Threat of Harm by Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson to Sibling One and Sibling Two.
- OKDHS lists an allegation of Neglect/Death - Pending Death Medical Examiner Programs Review Pending to Isabella Johnson by Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson.

PRIOR INVOLVEMENT OF THE PRFC(S) WITH OKLAHOMA DEPT. OF HUMAN SERVICES

There were three pertinent reports prior to the death of one-year-old Isabella Johnson. Prior reports indicate a pattern of allegations regarding concerns for Threat of Harm (Substance Abuse) and Inadequate or Dangerous Shelter by Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson. OKDHS completed various safety/home assessments regarding the family in the prior investigations to determine the parents' protective capacities to Sibling One, Sibling Two, and Isabella Johnson.

Pertinent Report 1

On June 2, 2023, the first pertinent report was received by the OKDHS office in Pawnee County. It was reported that there were concerns for the newborn, Isabella, because her cord blood results were positive for marijuana at birth. It was reported that Ms. Johnson did not have a medical marijuana card.

OKDHS accepted the report as a Priority II Investigation.

Investigation

OKDHS spoke to Ms. Johnson, who reported that she used a tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) cream for neck pain and thought it could not get to the baby. Ms. Johnson denied smoking marijuana throughout her pregnancy. Ms. Johnson reported that Mr. Johnson used marijuana and had a medical marijuana card. Ms. Johnson reported that if Mr. Johnson was not working, he smoked three joints a day. Ms. Johnson reported that Mr. Johnson had been sober from heroin for three years and received outpatient services through a methadone clinic in Tulsa. Ms. Johnson stated that the prescribed methadone he received was in a lock box located underneath their bed. Ms. Johnson stated that Mr. Johnson kept the marijuana in the bedside drawer but could move it higher into the closet until she could get a lock box.

Mr. Johnson denied that Ms. Johnson smoked marijuana but reported that she used THC cream on her neck to

relieve pain. Mr. Johnson reported smoking marijuana, but never around the children. Mr. Johnson confirmed that he had a heroin addiction three years earlier and was currently prescribed methadone. The children were observed in the home by OKDHS, and no concerning disclosures were made. OKDHS was unable to observe where Isabella was sleeping because the family dog was locked inside the room. OKDHS determined the home was appropriate for the children. Third-party witnesses reported no concerns for the children.

- OKDHS made an Unsubstantiated Finding of Neglect/Threat of Harm

Pertinent Report 2

On September 16, 2024, the Pawnee County OKDHS office received the second pertinent report. It was reported that Mr. Johnson was using marijuana, methamphetamine, and other drugs in the home. Animal feces were strewn throughout the home, and the house was filthy. One of the younger children, who crawled on the floor, had developed an infected eye due to the condition of the home. It was reported that the home had very little food. There were concerns about how Mr. Johnson treated Sibling One, and Ms. Johnson was not doing anything about it. The reporter stated that Mr. Johnson had hit Sibling One with a switch and that Sibling One had a straight-line bruise on the wrist from Mr. Johnson. Mr. Johnson would make Sibling One take a cup of water and a peanut butter sandwich to the cellar as punishment. Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson were violent toward each other.

- OKDHS accepted the report as a Priority Two Investigation.

Investigation

Sibling One reported that the scratch on their arm was from the cat. OKDHS observed the scratch on Sibling One's arm and reported that it was only surface level and appeared to be from the cat. Sibling One disclosed that Mr. Johnson sends Sibling One to the basement with only a sandwich and water when Sibling One punches or hurts others. Sibling One indicated that Mr. Johnson does swat and had a special switch used for discipline. Sibling One was asked where the basement was located and where the switch was kept, but Sibling One could not provide any further details.

Ms. Johnson reported that Sibling One had been having behavioral issues and had become violent toward Ms. Johnson, Mr. Johnson, and other people. Ms. Johnson reported that Mr. Johnson had threatened to lock Sibling One in their room with only a sandwich and water until the room had been cleaned. Ms. Johnson reported that she was trying to find a counselor to help with the child's behaviors but had been unsuccessful in getting services started. Ms. Johnson stated that she had a medical marijuana card and only smoked outside when the children were asleep. Ms. Johnson showed OKDHS the lock box where the marijuana was kept. Ms. Johnson stated that they had not spanked in about a year because it was not helping, as Sibling One was still having the same behaviors. Ms. Johnson denied having a switch in the home for discipline. Ms. Johnson denied any domestic violence in the home and stated that when an argument occurred, they talked it out or screamed at each other.

Mr. Johnson reported that Sibling One had been in counseling and that he had asked the counselor for help on how to react to Sibling One's behaviors but was still waiting on resources. Mr. Johnson reported that Sibling One had been violent toward him and showed OKDHS a scratch/handprint on his back where Sibling One had attacked him. Mr. Johnson stated that he had threatened to lock Sibling One in the room with only a sandwich and water until the room was cleaned. Mr. Johnson stated that he did not use marijuana and that, when Ms. Johnson did use marijuana, it was outside and away from the children. Mr. Johnson reported that they had arguments, but they were never physical, and they had never had a screaming match. Mr. Johnson stated that they gave each other the silent treatment.

Third-party witnesses confirmed that the family was having a difficult time managing Sibling One's behaviors but was working with outpatient services.

OKDHS completed a walk-through of the home and found it to be appropriate, with no safety concerns noted for the children. Sibling Two and Isabella were observed in the home, and no concerning marks or bruises were noted. OKDHS observed that there was no basement, as the home was a trailer.

- OKDHS made an Unsubstantiated Finding of Neglect/Threat of Harm by Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson to Sibling One, Sibling Two, and Isabella Johnson.
- OKDHS made an Unsubstantiated Finding of Neglect/Inadequate or Dangerous Shelter by Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson to Sibling Two and Isabella Johnson.

Pertinent Report 3

On January 9, 2025, the OKDHS office in Pawnee County received the third pertinent report. It was reported that three-year-old Sibling Two was transferred to the emergency room for a possible seizure. It was reported that Narcan was administered to Sibling Two and that, when Sibling Two was drug tested, Sibling Two tested positive for methadone. It was reported that Sibling Two was lethargic, falling asleep, unresponsive, and breathing slowly. Mr. Johnson stated that they had six dogs in the home and believed the dogs had gotten a hold of his empty methadone bottle from the trash, and then Sibling Two got a hold of it. Sibling Two was transported to the pediatric intensive care unit for observation. It was reported that the home was filthy, with dog feces, laundry, and trash everywhere. It was reported that the odor of the home was so bad that it could be smelled before stepping onto the porch.

- OKDHS accepted this report as a Priority II, with an Immediate Response.

Investigation

OKDHS observed Sibling Two asleep in the hospital. Mr. Johnson stated that he noticed Sibling Two being groggy and sleepwalking around 9:00 a.m. Mr. Johnson stated that he became more concerned when Sibling Two was not waking up easily because Sibling Two had a bubbly personality. Mr. Johnson stated that Ms. Johnson took Sibling Two to a medical facility that afternoon when Sibling Two started having seizures. Mr. Johnson stated that a medical professional reported Sibling Two had a febrile seizure and that it was common for children Sibling Two's age who were trying to fight off an infection. Mr. Johnson stated that Sibling Two was transferred to another hospital, and the doctor there told him Sibling Two had trace amounts of methadone in Sibling Two's system. Mr. Johnson stated that he had a substance use disorder all his life but had been sober for about three years. Mr. Johnson stated that he currently had a prescription for methadone. Mr. Johnson stated that he stored the methadone in a lock box and that, as soon as he took the medication, he put the lid back on and threw the bottle away.

Ms. Johnson stated that Sibling Two stayed up with Mr. Johnson until about 2:00 a.m., and when Sibling Two woke up at 9:00 a.m., she thought that staying up late explained Sibling Two's tiredness. Ms. Johnson stated that she went to work and, when she got back around 2:00 p.m., Sibling Two started convulsing, and she immediately drove Sibling Two to the emergency room. Ms. Johnson stated that it was indicated to her that Sibling Two had an infection and was given antibiotics. Ms. Johnson stated that the doctor gave Sibling Two Narcan to wake Sibling Two up from the Ativan that had been given to Sibling Two. Ms. Johnson stated that Sibling Two completed a urinalysis at the first hospital and that the test came back with no positive results. Ms. Johnson stated that a computed tomography scan was completed on Sibling Two and that no brain damage was noted. Ms. Johnson reported that it was not until Sibling Two was transferred to the other hospital that they were told Sibling Two had ingested methadone. Ms. Johnson reported that she had no idea how Sibling Two could have ingested the methadone. Ms. Johnson assumed that Sibling Two had possibly found a bottle that one of the puppies had knocked out of the trash at home.

Medical professionals were interviewed on January 10, 2025, and reported that Sibling Two was never noted to be in critical condition or that the methadone ingestion was a near-death event. It was confirmed that the first hospital did not complete a urinalysis on Sibling Two because Sibling Two was having a seizure caused by a fever, indicating that, at that time, a urinalysis was not needed. A medical professional stated that Sibling Two was transferred to another hospital to be observed in the pediatric intensive care unit, and it was confirmed there that Sibling Two tested positive for methadone.

OKDHS did not observe any methadone bottles lying around the house. OKDHS noted concerns that the family may have spent the day cleaning the home, knowing OKDHS would be there later in the day. The home was

observed to be very cluttered, with piles of laundry, roaches, and some dirty dishes. OKDHS did not deem the home to be inappropriate or a safety hazard. OKDHS confirmed the methadone to be in a lock box and out of reach of the children. The children were observed in the home, and Sibling One did not make any concerning disclosures about feeling unsafe.

OKDHS went back to the home to address new allegations with the family on February 21, 2025, but no contact was made. Sibling One was seen at school on February 27, 2025, and did not make any concerning disclosures of abuse or neglect.

Additional attempts were made to view the home on February 27, 2025, and no contact was made. OKDHS observed fresh trash, including dirty diapers, lying on the front porch when attempting contact at the home. OKDHS attempted to visit the home on February 28, 2025, and no contact was made with the family. OKDHS noted the porch to be very dirty, as observed the day before.

On March 12, 2025, OKDHS spoke to Sibling One at school. Sibling One stated that Sibling Two had been sick and running a fever. Sibling One stated that they were all in the car with Mr. Johnson while Ms. Johnson was inside working at the restaurant. Sibling One stated that around 2:00 p.m., Ms. Johnson entered the car to leave and noticed Sibling Two turning blue and making a gurgling sound. Sibling One stated that Ms. Johnson woke Mr. Johnson and told him that Sibling Two was turning blue and having a seizure. Sibling One stated that, at the hospital, Sibling Two would not wake up and Sibling Two's heart rate was going crazy. Sibling One stated that Mr. Johnson was usually very good at putting methadone bottles in the trash and keeping them in the lock box. Sibling One reported not seeing any methadone bottles when they went back home from the hospital.

Third party witnesses reported safety concerns for the children in the home. It was reported that the living conditions were not appropriate as there were animal feces and trash strewn throughout the home. It was reported that the children were unkempt and malodorous.

On March 21, 2025, OKDHS spoke to the methadone clinic where Mr. Johnson was being seen. It was reported that Mr. Johnson had been a patient since 2021. Mr. Johnson was prescribed 160 mg/day of liquid methadone. The methadone clinic confirmed that Mr. Johnson was drug tested approximately every six to eight weeks. It was reported that, in every test Mr. Johnson had taken, he had tested positive for the expected methadone as well as MTap (p-methylthioamphetamine), which is a drug similar to ecstasy. A few tests had been positive for BZP (Benzylpiperazine) and other psychoactive substances (OPS), which are also similar to MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine). It was reported that Mr. Johnson had been prescribed 1,134 bottles of methadone to take home and that, during his time at the clinic, he had only missed four appointments. It was confirmed that Mr. Johnson had attended 182 appointments.

OKDHS found the children unsafe due to the new referral received by OKDHS regarding the death of Isabella on March 3, 2025. OKDHS requested the removal of the children within that investigation, and the children were placed in OKDHS custody.

- OKDHS made a Substantiated finding of Neglect/Threat of Harm by Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson to Sibling One, Sibling Two, and Isabella.
- OKDHS made a Substantiated finding of Neglect/Inadequate or Dangerous Shelter by Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson to Sibling One, Sibling Two, and Isabella.
- OKDHS made a Substantiated finding of Neglect/Lack of Supervision by Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson to Sibling Two.
- OKDHS made a Substantiated finding of Abuse/Mental Injury by Mr. Johnson and Ms. Johnson to Sibling One.

JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS PRIOR TO THE CHILD'S DEATH

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