



**REVIEW OF NEAR DEATH OF H.W.
OF OKLAHOMA COUNTY, OKLAHOMA**
Report Release Date: July 26, 2022

Overview

This review is regarding the near-death of thirteen-year-old H.W. A felony charge of three counts of Child Neglect was filed by the Oklahoma County District Attorney on May 15, 2020 against the biological mother, Jennifer White. On September 7, 2021, Ms. White entered a plea of guilty and was approved for placement into mental health court.

Identifiers:

Child's Name:	H.W.
Age at Time of Incident:	Thirteen years
Date of Near-Death:	December 20, 2019
Persons Responsible for the Child (PRFC):	
• Jennifer White	
Sibling One:	Ten years

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. Section 1-6-105.

The OJSO did not become aware of this case until after the near-death incident of the child.

Near Death Incident

The near-death report was received by the Oklahoma County OKDHS on October 30, 2019. Prior to the report, twelve-year-old H.W. was admitted to a medical facility on September 18, 2019 suffering from severe anxiety and malnutrition and was discharged on September 27, 2019, at a healthy weight. From October 30, 2019 to December 19, 2019 OKDHS attempted to assist Ms. White in getting H.W. the necessary care for his condition, but she was uncooperative. On December 20, 2019, OKDHS obtained emergency custody of H.W. and admitted him to a medical facility for care. At the time of the December 20 admission, H.W. had lost twenty-three pounds since the September 27 discharge.

H.W. had not been in any sort of schooling for the past four years and could not recall anything H.W. had learned. H.W. developed an eating disorder by having severe food insecurity over the six months prior to admission. H.W. disclosed there was either not enough food, so H.W. would not eat in order for the mother, Jennifer White, and Sibling One to eat; or, if there was food in the home, it was not healthy. H.W. disclosed eating a lot of Ramen noodles for three months straight. H.W. disclosed getting to the point where H.W. enjoyed feeling hungry. Due to H.W. not eating, H.W.'s pre-existing anxiety was elevated. The

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elevation caused H.W. to be admitted to a medical facility with severe anxiety. The medical facility used medication and therapy to help H.W. H.W. progressed well in the two-weeks H.W. was at the medical facility in September 2019.

Upon discharge, the staff was insistent that H.W. would need weekly therapy and weekly medical appointments. H.W. also disclosed the home was very unsanitary with over twenty-five cats in the home. This disclosure was supported by H.W.'s bedding and clothing smelling of kitty litter that permeated the room up to the last day H.W. was at the medical facility. H.W. responded well to therapy and started anti-anxiety medications as part of treatment. The medical facility staff explained to Ms. White that H.W. would need therapy and medical appointments in order for the medical facility to discharge H.W. earlier than usual.

H.W. did not attend any follow-up appointments since discharge on September 27, 2019. The medical staff called Ms. White multiple times. When Ms. White was finally reached, Ms. White stated H.W. would not be participating in follow-up appointments with the facility due to acquiring a different psychiatrist. The staff tried to coordinate with Ms. White to retrieve the new psychiatrist's name, but Ms. White did not provide the information. As of September 27, 2019, H.W. had not received any follow-up medical care with the facility and a psychiatrist-only care plan would not be adequate to treatment for H.W.'s eating disorder.

The OKDHS accepted this report as a Priority II Investigation.

Investigation

The persons interviewed during the investigation included the biological mother, Jennifer White, and various collaterals.

The OKDHS documented that from October 30, 2019 to December 19, 2019, Ms. White failed to cooperate with the OKDHS. On November 26, 2019, Ms. White informed the OKDHS that she was not legally obligated to let the OKDHS into her home or interview her children.

The OKDHS documented that since H.W.'s discharge from the medical facility on September 27, 2019, H.W. had seen H.W.'s primary care physician one time and was scheduled to see the physician again on December 12, 2019. The OKDHS documented that on December 19, 2019, H.W.'s primary care physician reported that H.W. had experienced a seven-pound weight loss between the two physician visits and the physician noted H.W. needed to be admitted to a medical facility.

The OKDHS documented they made an attempt on December 19, 2019, to get Ms. White to take H.W. to a medical facility. Ms. White asked for a couple of hours in order to speak with H.W.'s primary care physician. After several hours, phone calls, and a child welfare check, Ms. White still refused to take H.W. to a medical facility. The OKDHS documented that on December 20, 2019, they requested emergency custody of H.W. and a pickup order was signed by an Oklahoma County Juvenile Judge.

The OKDHS documented that H.W. was transported to a medical facility. H.W. was admitted due to malnutrition. Medical professionals reported that upon admission on December 20, 2019, H.W. weighed sixty-five pounds, a twenty-three-pound loss from H.W.'s hospital discharge in September 2019.

While at the medical facility, medical professionals attempted to install a feeding tube for H.W. During the

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procedure, it was discovered that H.W.'s stomach had become necrotic. H.W. needed emergency surgery to repair it. During surgery, medical professionals had to remove approximately eighty percent (80%) of H.W.'s stomach. The OKDHS documented that H.W. has had to have several surgeries due to the state of H.W.'s health. The OKDHS documented medical professionals did not want to have prolonged surgeries, so they separated the surgeries out.

The OKDHS conferred with a child abuse pediatrician, who made findings of Neglect and Medical Neglect for a lack of medical care and nutrition for H.W.

The OKDHS documented that H.W. disclosed there were twenty-one cats in the home. H.W. was not enrolled in school. H.W. disclosed not remembering being in school since the third grade. H.W. disclosed that Ms. White and Sibling One sleep during the day and stay up all night. Because H.W. slept at night and was awake during the day, H.W.'s food intake was not monitored. H.W. disclosed not having a bowel movement in a week. H.W. disclosed H.W. only drank a cup of tea a day and nothing else. H.W. disclosed Ms. White made H.W. eat some potatoes and vegetables the night of December 19, 2019, after the OKDHS had come by to check on them.

After the removal of H.W., law enforcement executed a search warrant at Ms. White's home as part of the investigation. The OKDHS documented that law enforcement reported the home to be in deplorable condition and unsafe for Sibling One. The OKDHS documented that Sibling One was placed in emergency custody on January 3, 2020.

The OKDHS documented they observed Sibling One to have no concerning marks or bruises to the body and did not appear malnourished. The OKDHS documented that Sibling One disclosed the home was a mess and there were about thirty-four cats in the home. Sibling One disclosed sleeping in the living room because the bed was covered in cat feces and urine. Sibling One disclosed that if a cat died, Ms. White would either put the cat in a box outside or in the freezer. Sibling One disclosed the family has run out of food before, but could not remember when the last time that happened or how many times. Sibling One stated they had not been to school since the first grade.

The OKDHS made a Substantiated Finding of Neglect/Near-Death as to Jennifer White on H.W. The OKDHS made a Substantiated Finding of Neglect/Educational as to Jennifer White on H.W. and Sibling One. The OKDHS made a Substantiated Finding of Neglect/Threat of Harm as to Jennifer White on Sibling One. The OKDHS recommended the children remain in the custody of the OKDHS and that a deprived petition be filed on their behalf.

Prior Involvement of the PRFC with the Oklahoma Department of Human Services

The OJSO identified two pertinent reports of child abuse prior to the near-death incident of twelve-year-old H.W.

The first pertinent report was received by Oklahoma County OKDHS on September 1, 2019. Reportedly, H.W. and Sibling One do not attend school. The day prior, August 31, 2019, Sibling One stated they had not been to school in years. Sibling One disclosed they were supposed to start online school, but did not have a computer. It was reported Ms. White has several cats and Sibling One disclosed there was cat feces and urine on the floor throughout the house. Sibling One disclosed not having brushed their teeth in a long time, and never having been to a dentist. It was reported about a month prior, in July 2019; law

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enforcement went to the home because Sibling One ran away to a neighbor's home. It took an hour and a half for Ms. White to answer the door. Ms. White did not know Sibling One was missing.

The OKDHS accepted the report as a Priority II Assessment.

The OKDHS documented Ms. White refused to allow the OKDHS to see or speak to the children. Ms. White refused to allow the OKDHS into her home. The OKDHS documented when Ms. White opened the door to speak to the OKDHS, the OKDHS could smell cat urine and feces through the open door.

The OKDHS documented that on October 17, 2019, law enforcement accompanied the OKDHS to visit the home to get Ms. White to allow access to the children. The OKDHS documented law enforcement stated to the OKDHS they had no cause to enter the home.

The OKDHS was unable to make a safety determination for the Priority II Assessment, as they were denied access to the children and the home by Ms. White. The allegations were Neglect/Educational, Failure to Obtain Medication, Failure to Provide Adequate Nutrition, and Inadequate or Dangerous Shelter.

The second pertinent report was received by Oklahoma County on September 26, 2019. Reportedly, Ms. White took H.W. to the pediatrician on September 18, 2019. It was reported that the pediatrician took one look at H.W. and sent H.W. directly to the Emergency Department. H.W. was admitted to a medical facility due to an eating disorder/anorexia nervosa.

It was reported H.W. disclosed there had not been enough food in the home for the past five months. As a result, H.W. stopped eating so Sibling One and Ms. White would have food to eat. H.W. disclosed H.W. enjoyed the feeling of not eating, and lost about ten pounds over the past few months. H.W. was happy with the weight loss. It was reported Ms. White stated H.W. had not eaten anything in the twenty-four hours leading up to H.W.'s admittance on September 18, 2019. Ms. White stated she noticed H.W. had lost weight. Ms. White suspected H.W. might have Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) but never sought counseling for H.W.

It was reported, H.W. disclosed they had over twenty-five cats in the home, and the house was very dirty. It was reported that H.W. had been in the medical facility for a week, and H.W.'s belongings still had a strong cat urine smell. H.W. disclosed Ms. White would buy food for the cats, but there would not be enough food for the people in the home to eat. It was reported H.W. had been eating well while at the medical facility, and would be discharged on September 27, 2019.

The OKDHS Screened Out the report as a Subsequent Report.

Judicial Proceedings Prior to the Child's Near-Death

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

