

## Office of Juvenile System Oversight

# REVIEW OF THE NEAR DEATH OF R.C. KIOWA COUNTY, OKLAHOMA

Report Release Date: March 27, 2025

## OVERVIEW

On October 1, 2024, the biological mother, Ashley Smith, was charged with three felony counts of Child Neglect by the Kiowa County District Attorney. The preliminary hearing conference is scheduled for May 2, 2025.

## IDENTIFIERS

Child's Name:	Age at Time of Incident:	Date of Near-Death Incident:
R.C.	Eleven Years Old	September 25, 2024
Person Responsible for Child (PRFC):	Additional Identifiers:	
Ashley Smith (Biological Mother)	Sibling One, Seven Years Old Sibling Two, Seven Years Old Sibling Three, Twelve Years Old Sibling Four, Fourteen Years Old Sibling Five, Fifteen Years Old Sibling Six, Seventeen 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 Title 10A § 1-6-105H.

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

## NEAR-DEATH INCIDENT

On September 25, 2024, the OKDHS office in Jackson County received the near-death report. Reportedly, R.C., who was a medically fragile child, was found home alone with a sibling and appeared to have been physically neglected. R.C. was taken to the emergency room, where R.C. was found to have been malnourished, filthy, and emaciated.

- OKDHS accepted the report as a Priority I Investigation.

## INVESTIGATION

The persons interviewed during the investigation included the biological mother, Ashley Smith, the stepfather, the biological father, and various third parties.

On September 25, 2025, the OKDHS office in Jackson County received a near-death report. The report alleged that eleven-year-old R.C. had arrived at the hospital via Emergency Medical Services (EMS).

R.C. had been malnourished, filthy, and emaciated, weighing only 22 pounds. EMS reported that the house had been filthy, with trash and feces throughout. "R.C. arrived at the hospital in a sleeping bag covered in R.C.'s own urine and feces."

R.C. had been transported by ambulance to a rural hospital, where R.C. had been admitted. Later that same day, R.C. had been transferred to a metropolitan hospital to receive a higher level of care. After a few days of receiving fluids, medical personnel reported that R.C. had weighed 29.8 pounds and had been monitored for refeeding syndrome.

During the investigation, it was discovered that the children had been left responsible for caring for R.C. and had been home alone. According to the documentation, R.C. had appeared "very stiff and appeared to be trying to shake. R.C.'s clothes had been filthy, and R.C. had been in what appeared to be pajamas. R.C.'s hair had appeared to be matted and filthy."

Child Protective Services (CPS) noted that R.C. had been lying on the floor in the trash. The home had been described as filthy, emitting a strong and foul odor. CPS had also observed dog feces throughout the house, including in the same room where R.C. had been.

Later, Ms. Smith arrived at the home and claimed that the oldest siblings had been responsible for watching the children, blaming them for being left alone. Ms. Smith was subsequently arrested for child neglect and taken to the Kiowa County Jail.

- OKDHS made a Substantiated Finding of Neglect: Near Death by biological mother Ashley Smith to R.C., Sibling One, Sibling Two, Sibling Three, Sibling Four, Sibling Five, and Sibling Six.
- OKDHS made a Substantiated Finding of Neglect: Abandonment by biological mother Ashley Smith to R.C., Sibling One, Sibling Two, Sibling Three, Sibling Four, Sibling Five, and Sibling Six.
- OKDHS made a Substantiated Finding of Neglect: Inadequate or Dangerous Shelter by biological mother Ashley Smith to R.C. Sibling One, Sibling Two, Sibling Three, Sibling Four, Sibling Five, and Sibling Six.

R.C. was placed in OKDHS emergency custody on September 25, 2024. The siblings were also found to have been unsafe and were placed under a court-supervised out-of-home safety plan.

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

There had been eight pertinent reports prior to the near-death incident of eleven-year-old R.C.

### Pertinent Investigation 1

On July 9, 2015, the OKDHS office in Jackson County received the first pertinent report. Concerns had been raised regarding R.C.'s care, specifically noting that R.C.'s feeding tube had been observed with blood in it. It had also been reported that the mother had been leaving the children with inappropriate individuals.

- OKDHS accepted the report as a Priority I Investigation.

During the investigation, Ms. Smith reported that R.C. had been diagnosed with cerebral palsy and had required a G-tube for feeding. She also stated that R.C. had been seen for well-child checkups and had been under the care of a neurologist at a metropolitan hospital in Oklahoma, along with several specialists at another metropolitan hospital.

R.C. appeared clean and dressed in a onesie during the specialist's visit. Ms. Smith stated that she had dressed R.C. in onesies to prevent R.C. from playing with the feeding tube, as it bled when R.C. touched it.

CPS noted that R.C.'s feeding tube had appeared clean and had not been bloody. Ms. Smith reported that she had taken R.C. to the doctor a month prior regarding the bleeding from R.C.'s feeding tube, and Silver Nitrate had been prescribed.

R.C.'s primary care office had been contacted, and no concerns had been reported. The primary care office had confirmed that the issue with the blood had been addressed, and that medication had been prescribed for the child. The children had been found safe, as Ms. Smith had acted appropriately by not leaving them alone and ensuring that R.C.'s medical needs had been met.

- OKDHS made an Unsubstantiated Finding of Neglect/Lack of Supervision by the biological mother, Ashley Smith, to R.C, Sibling Three, Sibling Four, Sibling Five, and Sibling Six
- OKDHS made an Unsubstantiated Finding of Neglect/Threat of Harm by the biological mother, Ashley Smith, to R.C.
- OKDHS made an Unsubstantiated Finding of Neglect/Failure to Obtain Medical Attention by the biological mother, Ashley Smith, and biological father to R.C.

## **Pertinent Investigation 2**

On November 15, 2023, the second pertinent report had been received by the OKDHS office in Kiowa County. It had been reported that Sibling Three had disclosed that the mother had gone out of town, leaving the siblings home alone with the oldest child in charge. The mother had reportedly traveled to Texas and had been expected to return that night or the following day. Sibling Three had reportedly not seemed upset or bothered by the situation. It had been unknown if this had happened before.

Additional information indicated that the school had reported the children had been absent the previous day but had been dropped off at school by their mother. The Chief of Police had reported no concerns regarding the mother. This report was screened out and had not been accepted for investigation.

## **Pertinent Investigation 3**

On April 8, 2024, the OKDHS office in Jackson County received the third pertinent report. It had been reported that Sibling Three had cut himself while babysitting R.C., Sibling One, and Sibling Two. The reporter had stated that R.C. was a child with special needs and had required a feeding tube. The reporter had also stated that the mother had not been home at the time, and Sibling Three had to flag down some school staff. It had also been reported that Sibling Three had been placed in a facility for the child's mental needs.

- This report was screened out and had not been accepted for investigation.

## **Pertinent Investigation 4**

On April 11, 2024, the fourth pertinent report had been received by the OKDHS office in Jackson County. It had been reported that Sibling Three had disclosed that the mother had left R.C. at home alone while she had gone to work and attended other activities. The reporter had not specified when the mother had left R.C. alone at home.

It had also been reported that R.C. had been in a wheelchair, had a feeding tube, had been nonverbal, and had been incontinent. Additionally, it had been noted that R.C. had been taken out of public school a year prior and had been homeschooled.

- OKDHS accepted the report as a Priority II investigation.

During the investigation, the children reported that they were rarely left alone, but if they were, the older siblings watched them while the parents were at work. According to documentation, R.C. had been briefly observed by CPS and had been seen smiling, free of visible marks or bruises. PRFCs had denied the allegations.

Ms. Smith stated that only the older children had been responsible for helping with R.C. and denied leaving them alone for extended periods. She had reported that R.C. had been homeschooled and had not been enrolled in a public school due to R.C.'s condition and her fear that R.C. would become ill.

On April 22, 2024, new information from a screened-out report prompted another visit to the home following another report about R.C. being left alone with Sibling Three. Sibling Three had reported being left home alone for about 10 minutes but had stated that it was not often. Sibling Three also reported that the older siblings had been home when their mother was not. R.C. had not been observed, and an interview was not conducted for April 22, 2024.

Third parties from R.C.'s primary care physician's office had indicated that R.C. had last been seen around January 2023 and had then been dropped for missing appointments. However, Ms. Smith had taken R.C. to the doctor when referrals for specialists had been made.

- OKDHS made an Unsubstantiated Finding of Neglect/Lack of Supervision by biological mother Ashley Smith to R.C. and Sibling Three.
- OKDHS made an Unsubstantiated Finding of Neglect/Threat of Harm by biological mother Ashley Smith to R.C.

The children were found safe. CPS recommended that R.C. follow up with specialists and follow all the provider's recommendations.

### **Pertinent Investigation 5**

On April 22, 2024, the fifth pertinent report had been received by the OKDHS office in Jackson County. It had been reported that the stepfather had been beating the children, Sibling Three had not been taking prescribed antipsychotic medication, and R.C. had been left home alone.

- This report was screened out and not accepted for investigation due to the family having an open investigation (Pertinent Investigation 4).

### **Pertinent Investigation 6**

On August 16, 2024, the sixth pertinent report had been received by the OKDHS office in Jackson County. It had been reported that Sibling Three had not been enrolled in school but had walked to the school to ask for a band-aid. Sibling Three had made it seem like they had been caring for R.C. alone. Sibling Three had stated that R.C. had been doing well and had not needed to be fed for a few more hours.

Additional information received indicated that law enforcement had conducted a welfare check and had not found the children home alone.

- This report was screened out and had not been accepted for investigation.

### **Pertinent Investigation 7**

On September 5, 2024, the OKDHS office in Jackson County received the seventh pertinent report. Concerns had been raised that some of the children had not been attending school because they had been staying home to watch over R.C., who had required constant supervision due to R.C.'s chronic medical condition.

On September 6, 2024, OKDHS contacted the family, but the parents had not allowed Child Welfare Services into the home, stating they needed time to clean up. Both parents denied the allegations and stated that all the children, except for R.C. and Sibling Three, were enrolled in school. They had stated that R.C. had been homeschooled due to fears of R.C. getting sick at school, and the other child had been in the process of finding a different school after being expelled for behavioral issues.

All the children, except for Sibling Five, were observed but not thoroughly interviewed. R.C. had been observed to appear dirty and unkempt, but the parents had reported that R.C. had gotten matted up from sweating and lying

down most of the time.

- OKDHS accepted this report as a Priority Two Investigation.

During a forensic interview conducted on September 25, 2024, Sibling Three disclosed that Ms. Smith no longer lived at home or spent the nights there but checked on them every few hours. Sibling Three had also disclosed that his stepfather had worked out of town for weeks at a time, leaving the older children responsible for watching the younger siblings. Sibling Three had further disclosed that everyone except for the two youngest siblings had helped care for R.C.

Later that day, CPS and the Police Department visited the family's home and discovered that R.C. and the two youngest siblings had been home alone. These two siblings had disclosed that they had been responsible for watching R.C.; one reported having changed R.C.'s diaper because no one else had been there to do it.

R.C. had been brought out of the home, and CPS had observed that R.C. had appeared to have lost weight since their last visit.

- OKDHS made a Substantiated Finding of Neglect/Lack of Supervision by biological mother Ashley Smith and stepfather to R.C. and Sibling Three.
- OKDHS made a Substantiated Finding of Neglect/Education Neglect by biological mother Ashley Smith and stepfather to R.C. and Sibling Three.

### **Pertinent Investigation 8**

On September 9, 2024, the eighth pertinent report had been received by the OKDHS hotline. This report alleged that a sibling had disclosed being bitten by a dog while being home alone and responsible for caring for R.C., who had been nonverbal and in a wheelchair.

Law enforcement reported that they had responded to the home and were not concerned about the children being alone. They expressed that several calls had previously been made regarding the children being left home alone.

Due to the family having an open report, the assigned worker for the open report had been notified of this new information.

- This report was screened out and had not been accepted for investigation.

### **JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS PRIOR TO THE CHILD'S NEAR-DEATH**

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