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DCFS visited Fairview Heights foster home two days before death, report shows

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The Patricia Lane house in Fairview Heights, where police found fatally wounded Mackenzi Felmlee on May 11, 2024. Joshua Carter *Belleville News-Democrat*

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A placement worker visited a Fairview Heights foster home two days before police found 18-year-old Mackenzi Felmlee dying at the bottom of a staircase and after years of alleged physical and mental abuse.

The home at 6 Patricia Drive is owned by Shemeka Williams, 46, who was Felmlee’s foster mother and is one of two people now charged with [first-degree murder](#) in connection with her death on May 11, 2024. Also charged is Williams’ mother, Cornelia M. Reid, 64, who had also been a foster parent.

A 2024 report by the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services Office of Inspector General says the placement worker made “regular visits” and last saw Felmlee on May 9, two days before she died.

During pretrial hearings for Williams and Reid in June, St. Clair County prosecutors described their treatment of Felmlee as “torture” and showed photos taken from

Williams' cellphone documenting what they called a [pattern of abuse](#). They included pictures of Felmlee sitting in a car with clear bruising and abrasions to her face, head, shoulder and arm, which were taken on May 7, two days before the placement worker's final visit.

Other photos taken on May 1 showed wounds that left Felmlee's head bloodied and deeply bruised.

Defense attorneys for Williams and Reid have both argued that the wounds were self-inflicted and the result of Felmlee's [multiple psychological diagnoses](#). Williams photographed the wounds, they say, to document the progression of her illnesses.

Child No. 26

The [DCFS report](#) stated the agency had reviewed 168 cases in 2024. It refers to Felmlee only as Child No. 26, but makes other references that make her identity clear.

These include her date of birth, the cause of her death and circumstances surrounding it, the number of her siblings, and other key details available in public records and as presented by attorneys during Williams' pretrial hearings.

Attempts to directly confirm the identity of Child No. 26 were refused by the DCFS Office of Inspector General, which said any details not contained in the annual report are "confidential." The agency also declined to answer questions – both relative to the investigation and regarding general operating procedures – submitted by the News-Democrat.

Lutheran Child and Family Services, which placed Felmlee in Williams' care, also declined comment citing confidentiality requirements.

Observed injuries

According to police reports, officers were dispatched to the foster home on May 11 at 2:45 a.m. and found Felmlee unresponsive at the bottom of a staircase. Felmlee, a legal adult who remained a ward of the state, later died at Memorial Hospital in Belleville.

"She had bruising to her neck, upper shoulder, legs, and face, and petechia (red or purple spots caused by bleeding below the skin) in her eyes," the DCFS report stated. "The youth's 14-year-old foster sister reported the youth's injuries were caused by their foster grandmother."

The St. Clair County Coroner's office determined that Felmlee died from a pulmonary thromboembolism, which occurs when a blood clot travels to the lungs and causes a blockage. The DCFS annual report says the clot was "of undetermined traumatic" cause. Dehydration also was "a significant contributing factor," it said.

Prosecutors theorized that the clots formed due to constriction of Felmlee's legs. The 14-year-old, Williams' biological daughter, told investigators that Williams and Reid

had both tied plastic bags around Felmlee's legs to prevent the leak of human waste caused by her incontinence. That detail was included in the DCFS annual report.

A St. Clair County grand jury charged Williams and Reid each with: first-degree murder, involuntary manslaughter, three counts of domestic battery, two counts of intimidation, unlawful restraint, and two counts of misdemeanor domestic battery.

Both have pleaded not guilty to all charges. They were ordered held at the St. Clair County Jail until trial.

DCFS investigation summary

In its summary of the investigation, which the report classifies as a homicide, the DCFS Office of Inspector General wrote: "The youth came into DCFS care five years before her death after her mother left her and three younger siblings with a relative caregiver for an extended period, but she did not make long-term arrangements. The mother's parental rights were later terminated. In the year before her death, the youth was placed in a traditional foster home where she had resided for several years. Her permanency goal was adoption and she wished to be adopted by her foster mother, but the adoption was not completed before she turned 18. The youth had multiple mental health diagnoses and was under the care of a psychiatrist for medication management. She was also in therapy and had an IEP in school. The youth refused visits with her siblings and did not engage in life skills training. The youth's placement worker made regular visits and last saw the youth two days before her death."

In pretrial hearings, prosecutors raised complaints made against Williams and Reid by previous foster children who described withholding food and bathroom use, and physical abuse including belt whipping as punishment. DCFS determined all prior complaints to be "unfounded."

The Belleville News-Democrat contacted Felmlee's biological mother, Bonnie Felmlee, who has declined to comment.

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