

# DCFS Interim Director Issues Statement About Tragic Loss Of Ta'naja Barnes

by Dan Brannan, Content Director  
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## **DCFS Interim Director Debra Dyer-Webster:**

“DCFS is devastated by the loss of Ta’naja Barnes and is working with law enforcement to fully investigate what happened in this case. We have a responsibility to the children and families we serve to provide the best possible care, and we are committed to understanding where we come up short and striving to do better. Over the coming weeks and months, DCFS will be working with the new administration to increase our staff of caseworkers and investigators, review our practices on family involvement following case closure, and improve communication with the community of professionals involved in these cases.”

## **Background**

The Department of Children and Family Services would like to provide a clear timeline of its involvement with the family of Ta'naja Barnes, who died on February 11, 2019, in Decatur.

The Department will fully cooperate with any reviews or investigations by law enforcement, the Child Death Review Teams, and the DCFS Office of the Inspector General.

As with any child welfare case, a community of professionals was involved with Ta'naja's family, including DCFS investigators, private agency caseworkers and supervisors, court-appointed officials, and a juvenile court judge. DCFS is committed to improving communications across our partners to provide the best possible care to children and families.

DCFS will review our practice of family involvement following case closure in court, at which point any involvement with services would be voluntary for the family.

DCFS is also working with the new administration to improve our services more broadly. As a first step of building up DCFS, the governor's budget proposal would allow us to bring on 126 new direct service staff who work directly with children and upgrade our 30-year-old technology system. The governor's budget also invests in human service agencies to rebuild them after years of being hollowed out.

## **Family**

Ta'naja Barnes, age 2 at time of death

Half-brother of Ta'naja, age 1 ("Brother")

Mother of Ta'naja and Brother ("Mother")

Father of Ta'naja ("Father")

Live-in boyfriend of Mother / father of Brother ("Boyfriend")

## **Timeline**

12/23/17

DCFS received a hotline call alleging abuse and neglect regarding Ta'naja. At this time, Ta'naja was living with her mother, her mother's boyfriend and Ta'naja's brother.

12/27/17

A case was opened. Ta'naja and her brother were placed in foster care, with the case managed by Webster Cantrell Hall, a private agency.

12/28/17

The court granted DCFS temporary custody of Ta'naja and her brother.

Services to the mother and boyfriend began immediately and included mental health assessments, parenting classes and substance abuse screening. The family was compliant with services. Visitation with Ta'naja was established for her mother and father.

3/27/18

By order of the court, the children were returned home to their parents after successful completion of their parenting classes. Based on case-specific interactions, custody of Ta'naja was granted to her father. Her brother was returned to their mother and her boyfriend.

Beginning in March 2018, under court supervision, aftercare services were provided to both households by Webster Cantrell Hall. Some of the services included linkages to community resources, including programs administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services and the local health department. Visitation between the two involved families was established. During this time, caseworkers made routine visits with the families.

6/27/18

Ta'naja was removed from her father's home following a hotline call alleging abuse and again placed in foster care.

8/8/18

By order of the court, Ta'naja returned home to her mother and her boyfriend. Webster Cantrell Hall continued to monitor the home through weekly unannounced visits.

9/12/18

DCFS received a report alleging Ta'naja had red scratches on her stomach and a diaper rash. An investigation concluded the report was unfounded, as the marks were verified as scarring from a previous incident and no additional services were recommended.

10/24/18

Upon recommendation of Webster Cantrell Hall, based on family's cooperation with services and satisfactory monitoring of the home, the court ordered the case closed. With case closure, the child welfare community's involvement with this family ended.

11/06/18

A call was made to the DCFS hotline that was taken as an information only report regarding non-compliance with voluntary community services and medical neglect for lack of immunization. The call did not proceed to an investigation as the information provided did not substantiate allegations of medical neglect.

2/11/19

Ta'naja's death was reported to DCFS. DCFS opened investigation, in cooperation with the local police department.

Ta'naja's brother was placed in foster care, with the case managed by DCFS.