TEXAS
Department of Family and Protective Services

Child Care Investigations Child Fatality Protocol Handbook

June 2026

Contents

INTRODUCTION 3
INVESTIGATION POLICY & PROTOCOLS 3
INTERNAL NOTIFICATIONS WHEN A CHILD DIES 3
Notifying DFPS and HHSC Staff When a Child Dies 3
COMPLEX INVESTIGATION DIVISION 4
Within 5 calendar days of notifying the Complex Investigations Division of the fatality, a staffing must occur. The Complex Investigation Analyst completes CCI Notification of Child Fatality form 3021B as part of the staffing and uploads the form to neuDocs. See: Form 3021B 4
INVESTIGATING A CHILD'S DEATH 4
Steps for Investigating a Child's Death 4
ENTERING PRELIMINARY FINDINGS RELATED TO A CHILD'S DEATH 5
INITIAL DOCUMENTATION OF A CHILD'S DEATH 5
ENTERING THE DATE OF DEATH 5
Initial Action 5
COMPLETING THE MAINTAIN ALLEGATION TASK IN IMPACT 6
Initial Action - Answering the Child Fatality Allegation Indicator Question 6
Required Timeframe 7
Staffing an Investigation of a Child's Death 7
Completing the Investigation of a Child Fatality 7
DOCUMENTING A CHILD'S DEATH AT CASE CLOSURE 8
Documenting the Allegation(s), Disposition, and Severity 8
Assigning the Severity of Allegations When a Child Dies 9
COMPLETING THE FATALITY INFORMATION IN IMPACT 10
ENSURING CONSISTENCY IN IMPACT WHEN A CHILD DIES 10
Death Related to Restraints 11
Supervisory Approval of the Investigation of a Child's Death 12
The Roles of SWI, SI, CPS, and CCI When a Child Dies in a Residential Placement 12
INVESTIGATIONS CLOSED WITHOUT FINAL DEATH DETERMINATION 12
SUPPORTIVE SUPERVISION WHEN NOTIFIED OF THE CHILD FATALITY 14

INTRODUCTION

This protocol handbook serves as a companion to the policy handbook. It is designed to provide staff with a state-wide, consistent model for best practices and task-specific details to help staff meet policies.

Staff should be familiar with all sections of the protocol handbook and can utilize it throughout the course of a child fatality investigation.

It is important to note that this protocol handbook serves as the state-wide protocol.

INVESTIGATION POLICY & PROTOCOLS

It is critical that all staff that investigate child fatalities, understand all the applicable policies and procedures. In the section below, the various tasks and responsibilities are laid out following the ordering in the CCI Policy Handbook and in the timeline of an investigation. It is the responsibility of staff to refer to the CCI Policy Handbook for all tasks associated with any investigation, including those that involve child fatalities.

INTERNAL NOTIFICATIONS WHEN A CHILD DIES

Notifying DFPS and HHSC Staff When a Child Dies

Notification of a child fatality occurs when an intake report regarding the fatality is stage progressed to an investigation or the fatality involves a child in an open case, regardless of the stage of service or cause of death.

Within 24 hours, the program administrator:

- Completes CCI Notification of Child Fatality form 3021A
- Uploads a copy to neuDocs
- Distributes the completed final form as indicated below

See: Form 3021A

Regional Notification List:

- Assigned CCI investigator
- CCI investigators two levels of leadership
- Assigned Special Investigator
- Special Investigator's two levels leadership
- Regional Media Specialist
- Regional Nurse

Child Care Investigations Leadership:

- CCI Director
- CCI Deputy Director
- CCI Director of Field Operations
- CCI Compliance Analysts
- Childcare Investigations Mailbox
- CCI Quality Assurance Mailbox
- CCI Complex Investigations Mailbox

HHSC Notifications

- Child Care Regulation Fatality Mailbox

State Office Notification List

- DFPS Commissioner
- DFPS Deputy Commissioner of Programs
- DFPS Deputy Commissioner of Operations
- DFPS Chief of Staff
- DFPS General Counsel
- Associate Commissioner for Investigations
- Associate Commissioner for CPS
- Deputy Associate Commissioner for CPS
- Deputy Director of Government Relations
- CPS Director of Field Operations
- Director of Placement Services
- DFPS Media Relations Manager
- DFPS designated attorney (if requested)
- Chief Audit Officer
- Director of FCL Coordination
- Director of Office of Child Safety
- FCL Mailbox
- Heightened Monitoring Mailbox

If the fatality involves a child in conservatorship of DFPS, notifications are also sent to:

- CPS Regional Director – Death Region and Legal Region
- CPS Program Administrator – Death Region and Legal Region

COMPLEX INVESTIGATION DIVISION

Within 5 calendar days of notifying the Complex Investigations Division of the fatality, a staffing must occur. The Complex Investigation Analyst completes CCI Notification of Child Fatality form 3021B as part of the staffing and uploads the form to neuDocs. See: Form 3021B

INVESTIGATING A CHILD'S DEATH

Steps for Investigating a Child's Death

When CCI receives a report that a child is alleged to have died from abuse or neglect, the following occurs: the supervisor follows standard DFPS policies and procedures in 3000 Intake and Screening for accepting the report and assigning it for investigation. The procedures in 5300 Investigations of Fatalities and Near-Fatal Incidents are also followed (see Policy 5311 Actions in the First 24 Hours).

Once assigned, the investigator (CCI investigator and/or SI) takes the following steps:

1. The investigator gathers as much information as possible about the circumstances of the death, including information gathered from examinations, interviews, photographs, and the autopsy of the deceased child.

2. The investigator assesses the immediate safety of any surviving children in the home or operation, including following the procedures in CCI Handbook Section 4422.2 Contacting a Children's Advocacy Center About Certain Allegations.

.

3. The investigator determines by a preponderance of evidence whether the child's death was the result of abuse or neglect.

ENTERING PRELIMINARY FINDINGS RELATED TO A CHILD'S DEATH

The investigator enters into IMPACT the information that is known within the first 24 hours after being notified of the child's death including:

- The child's name.
- The child's gender.
- The child's date of birth (or the child's approximate age, if the date of birth is unknown). The date of the child's death (must be entered to activate the Fatality Information section).

The investigator may update the information as the investigation progresses and upon completion of the investigation.

The investigator makes the following selections in the *Fatality* section on the *Person Detail* page in IMPACT, as explained in the table below:

From the drop-down-menu titled …	the investigator chooses the following …
Manner of Death	*Pending investigation*, unless the manner of death is known at the beginning of the investigation. In that case, the investigator chooses either *natural causes* or *unnatural causes*, whichever best describes the cause of death.
Cause of Death	The specific disease, illness, or injury that best describes the cause of death.
Reason for Death (CPS)	*Leave Blank* (This drop-down is not for CCI cases)
Reason for Death (Non-CPS)	Left blank until the investigation can be dispositioned.
Findings	*Preliminary.*
Death Certificate/Autopsy	*Pending.*

Once the decision has been made that the justice of the peace or medical examiner will request an autopsy to be conducted, the supervisor must complete the *2810 Child Death Records Request letter* and submit it to the medical examiner or justice of the peace. The request letter must be submitted as soon as the autopsy has been ordered or within 24 hours after the death, if possible.

INITIAL DOCUMENTATION OF A CHILD'S DEATH

When documenting a child's death, the Initial Actions includes all of the following:

- Entering the Date of Death
- Completing the Maintain Allegation Task in IMPACT when a Child Dies
- Completing the Maintain Person Task in IMPACT when a Child Dies

ENTERING THE DATE OF DEATH

Initial Action

To allow the IMPACT system to properly distinguish a death that was investigated as being the possible result of abuse or neglect, the investigation worker:

- Reviews the *Person Detail* page in IMPACT immediately after the case is progressed to the *Investigation* stage; and
- Determines whether the date of death was entered at intake.

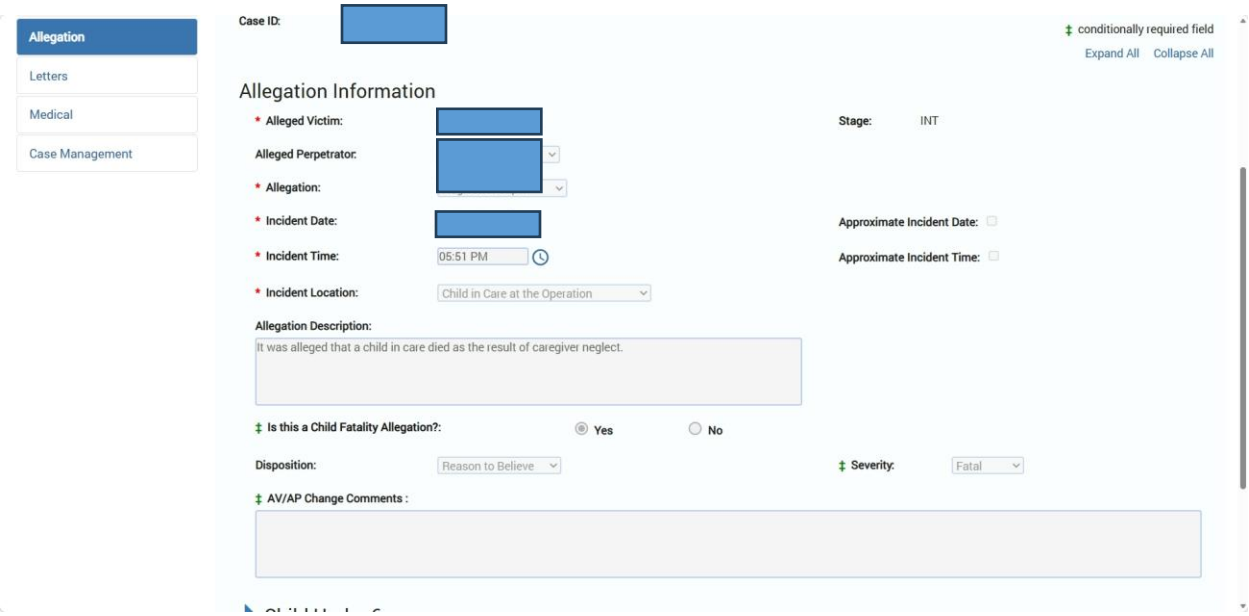
If no date of death was entered at intake, the investigation worker enters the date on the *Person Detail* page as soon as it is known.

If a child dies after an investigation of abuse or neglect is initiated, and CCI intends to investigate the death as the possible result of abuse or neglect, the investigation worker immediately enters the date of death on the *Person Detail* page.

Once the date of death is entered, whether at intake or during an investigation, the investigation worker immediately updates the Child Fatality Indicator question in the *Allegation Detail* page in the *Investigation* stage.

Texas Family Code §261.203 (a)(2)Child Fatality

Subchapter D, Chapter 702, Title 40 Texas Administrative Code (§§702.301-702.317)



If it becomes known during the course of an investigation that a child on the person list was deceased prior to the current involvement and the case is not a fatality investigation, enter the date of death and select the Reason for Death (Non-CPS) as Not Investigated (NIV).

COMPLETING THE MAINTAIN ALLEGATION TASK IN IMPACT

Initial Action - Answering the Child Fatality Allegation Indicator Question

When a date of death is entered for a child in an investigation (regardless of whether the date was entered in the *Intake* or *Investigation* stages of IMPACT), the investigation worker:

- Reviews in the *Investigation* stage on the *Allegation Detail* page each allegation that involves the deceased child as an alleged victim; and
- For each allegation selects either Y*es* or *No* in answer to the question: I*s this a child fatality allegation?*
  - If one question or more is asked to determine if the death is related to abuse or neglect, then the caseworker must answer Yes

Answering *Yes* to the Child Fatality Indicator question allows the department to gather and report data required by state and federal laws and regulations.

Answering *Yes* to the Child Fatality Indicator question does not imply that any abuse or neglect was found and does not affect the *Reason for Death (Non-CPS)* entered or the allegation disposition.

If the deceased child is not an alleged victim however one question or more is asked to determine if the

death is related to abuse or neglect, then allegations regarding the deceased child should be added and the Child Fatality Indicator question answered *Yes*.

RequiredTimeframe

The allegation Child Fatality Indicator question must be answered in IMPACT:

- Immediately upon progressing the case to the Investigation stage, if the date of death is entered during the intake for the death. or
- As soon as possible, but no later than 24 hours after the date of death becomes known to the investigation worker, if the date is being entered during an open investigation

Staffing an Investigation of a Child's Death

During the course of an investigation involving the death of a child, the investigator keeps the supervisor apprised of all investigation-related activities.

The investigator must conduct staffings as required. See 4122 Safety Staffing, 4123 Interim Staffing, and 4124 Dispositional Staffing.

Upon completion of the investigation, a final staffing includes all of the following individuals:

- The investigator.
- The supervisor.
- The program administrator
- Complex Investigation Analyst
- The DFPS attorney, if an Administrator will be given a disposition of Reason to Believe.

Completing the Investigation of a Child Fatality

When the investigator has completed all investigation activities, and sufficient evidence has been gathered to reach a disposition, the investigator consults with the supervisor. The investigator and supervisor determine the disposition. The Complex Investigations Division (CID) conducts a secondary review and approves the investigation.

The investigator updates documentation about the child’s death in IMPACT.

The supervisor uses the Child Death Records Request Letter to request the autopsy or death certificate. This letter can be sent by email or mail and must be sent as soon as the autopsy is ordered or within 24 hours after the death, if possible. The supervisor documents this request in a contact in IMPACT and uploads a copy of the request to the neuDocs application within IMPACT. The letter requests that the findings be sent to the CCI Mailbox at DFPSChildcareInvestigations@dfps.texas.gov.

If the final autopsy report or death certificate has not been received when the investigation is completed, the investigator enters the preliminary autopsy findings.

A death certificate must be requested for all cases where an autopsy by a Medical Examiner was not conducted and for all cases where only a medical autopsy was done.

See 2810 Child Death Records Request Letter

5312 Request for Child Fatality Records and Final Findings of the Medical Examiner

If the death certificate or autopsy results are obtained after the investigation is closed see: 4741.2

Required Notification When Changes Are Made to a Closed Investigation

When CCI makes edits or corrections (other than edits or corrections to remedy spelling or grammatical errors) to a closed investigation report, DFPS must complete Form 2957 Notification of Changes Made to a Child Care Investigation Report in IMPACT.

DOCUMENTING A CHILD'S DEATH AT CASE CLOSURE

Documenting the Allegation(s), Disposition, and Severity

At the conclusion of the investigation, the investigator updates the reason for a child's death under the ***Reason for Death (Non-CPS)*** drop-down menu on the *Person Detail* page in IMPACT.

The table below explains the *Reason for Death (Non-CPS)* codes used under the *Reason for Death (Non-CPS)* drop-down menu.

The investigator chooses a *Reason for Death (Non-CPS)* code for abuse or neglect, if all of the following apply:

- The disposition is *Reason to Believe.*
- The severity is *Fatal.*
- The answer is *Yes* to the IMPACT question *Is this a child fatality allegation?*

The reason for death entered in IMPACT automatically transfers to the *Investigation Victim and Parent Details* page in CLASS.

The ***Reason for Death (Non-CPS)*** Code	Applicable Dispositions	Circumstances Surrounding the Child's Death	Involvement With DFPS
NAB Not Abuse/Neglect Related	Any disposition, as long as the severity is not *Fatal* (that is, as long as the abuse or neglect was not the cause of death).	Either of the following: • A cause other than abuse or neglect. • There is not enough evidence to confirm abuse or neglect.	The child or perpetrator was or is involved with a DFPS investigation.
ABN Abuse/Neglect In Open Case	*RTB – Fatal*	The child died due to abuse or neglect.	An unrelated CCI investigation involving the child or perpetrator was open when a report of the child's death was received.
ABO Abuse/Neglect In Closed Case	*RTB – Fatal*	The child died due to abuse or neglect.	Both of the following are true: • The deceased child was a victim in a prior investigation or the person responsible for

			the death (the designated perpetrator) was an alleged or confirmed perpetrator in a closed investigation conducted by CCI. • There was no open investigation involving the child when the report of the child's death was received.
ABP Abuse/Neglect and No Prior Case	*RTB – Fatal*	The child died due to abuse or neglect.	Both of the following are true: • The child or designated perpetrator of the fatality have not been involved with a CCI investigation as a victim or perpetrator. • There was no open CCI investigation involving the child or designated perpetrator when the report of the child's death was received.
NIV Not Investigated	*ADM*	The child died, but CCI does not have investigative jurisdiction.	CCI does not have jurisdiction and the investigation is closed and referred to the appropriate investigative authority.

Assigning the Severity of Allegations When a Child Dies

If the investigator concludes that abuse or neglect caused or contributed to a child's death, the investigator does as follows in IMPACT on the *Allegation* page:

- Assigns the disposition as *Reason to Believe*.
- Assigns the severity as *Fatal*.

If the investigator concludes that abuse or neglect has occurred but did not cause or contribute to the child's death, the investigator does as follows in IMPACT on the *Allegation* page:

- Assigns the disposition as *Reason to Believe*.
- Assigns the severity as *Mild*, *Moderate*, or *Serious* (the investigator does not assign the severity as *Fatal*).

If the deceased child is not an alleged victim however one question or more is asked to determine if the death is related to abuse or neglect, then allegations regarding the deceased child should be added and the Child Fatality Indicator question answered Yes.

If the child died as a result of prior abuse neglect or exploitation of a CPI investigation the CCI program administrator will notify the CPI program administrator and the Lead Child Fatality Specialist with the Office of Child Risk and Safety so they may review the closed CPI Investigation and determine if the severity code of the previous disposition needs to be corrected. CCI Supervisor will also notify law enforcement in the jurisdiction in which the abuse or neglect occurred.

The CCI program administrator will document in IMPACT the reason why the fatality severity code was not selected in the CCI investigation as well as their notification to the CPI program administrator and Lead Child Fatality Specialist. The CCI program administrator then sends an email to the CCI designee to

move the previous completed CCI Notification of Fatality Form 3021A (if applicable) to the non-releasable folder on Child Fatality SharePoint Site.

COMPLETING THE FATALITY INFORMATION IN IMPACT

In order to complete the Fatality Information in IMPACT, the investigation worker selects *Fatality Information* as an option in the Person Detail window in IMPACT. The investigation worker completes the appropriate fields indicating:

- The *Manner of Death*;
- The *Cause of Death*;
- The *Autopsy Findings* and whether they are preliminary or final;
- The *Status of the Death Certificate/Autopsy (*pending or received); and
- The *Medical Examiner's Findings*.

The investigator should enter the autopsy findings into the *Fatality Information* window. These could be the preliminary findings if the final autopsy has not been received. In IMPACT, there is no 'pending investigation' drop down option for cause of death if the manner of death is still pending, but you have a preliminary cause of death from the medical examiner or the case circumstances strongly indicate a cause of death (i.e. asphyxiation, drowning, vehicle, etc.); enter 'pending investigation' for manner of death, select the cause of death, and discuss the ME information in the comment box. If the medical examiner is unable to provide a preliminary finding, leave the manner and cause of death BLANK and document in the comment box why this information cannot be provided until final autopsy. Include information such as, "Pending Death Certificate/Autopsy which was requested from Travis County Clerks Office on 01/01/2026, form xyz is uploaded to NeuDocs."

If the final autopsy is received after case closure, CCI staff will need to update the fatality information on the deceased child's person detail page and provide a copy to the Complex Investigation Analyst. To update the *Fatality Information* on the Person Detail Page, a Data Correction is required by calling IT Help desk and requesting that preliminary results be changed to **FINAL**, and pending autopsy be changed to **RECEIVED**.

If the final autopsy is received after case closure and includes information that was not previously known or suspected, consult with CCI management for next steps.

ENSURING CONSISTENCY IN IMPACT WHEN A CHILD DIES

The investigation worker ensures that the following data is entered consistently into the IMPACT case management system:

- The Non-CPS reason for the child's death **(Note: Do Not complete the CPS Only drop-down)**
- The disposition assigned to each allegation
- The severity of the allegations that have a disposition of *Reason to Believe*

- The answer to the question: *Is this a child fatality allegation?*

The following chart summarizes the data that must be entered consistently during the investigation.

Conclusion	Allegation	Reason for Death (Non-CPS)
The child died from abuse or neglect	IMPACT has at least one allegation relating to the abuse or neglect that resulted in the child's death. For at least one allegation entered, the worker: • names the deceased child as a victim; • selects Yes in answer to the question: *Is this a child fatality allegation?* • assigns the disposition of *Reason to Believe*; and • assigns the severity of *Fatal*.	The investigation worker chooses one of the following in IMPACT: • *Abuse or neglect in an open case (ABN)* • *Abuse or neglect in a closed case (ABO)* • *Abuse or neglect, no prior (ABP)*
The child's death was investigated as possibly due to abuse or neglect, but was found not to be from abuse or neglect	The investigation worker: • does **not** assign the severity of *Fatal* to any allegation naming the deceased child as a victim; and • on at least one allegation must answer Yes to the question: *Is this a child fatality allegation?*	The investigation worker chooses *Not abuse or neglect related* in IMPACT (NAB)
The child's death was investigated as possibly due to abuse or neglect, but it could not be determined if the child died due to abuse/neglect	The investigation worker: • does **not** assign the severity code of *Fatal* to any allegation naming the deceased child as a victim; and • on at least one allegation must answer Yes to the question: *Is this a child fatality allegation?*	The investigation worker chooses *Not able to determine* in IMPACT (UTD)
The child's death was not investigated.	The investigation worker answers No to the question *Is this a child fatality allegation?*	The investigation worker chooses *Not related to abuse or neglect* in IMPACT (NIV)

Death Related to Restraints

If the child's death was related to the use of restraints, the investigator chooses one (or more) of the following types of restraints in the *Types of Restraints* section of the *CCL Investigation Conclusion* page in IMPACT:

- *Chemical Restraint*
- *Emergency Medication*
- *Mechanical Restraint*
- *Personal Restraint*
- *Seclusion*

If the death was not related to restraints, the investigator checks *No Restraints*.

Supervisory Approval of the Investigation of a Child's Death

When the investigator is ready to submit the case for approval in IMPACT, the investigator also does the following:

- Completes the Supervisor Reading Guide and uploads to neuDocs.

If CPI and CCI are both investigating the death of a child, the investigator must ensure that the information entered in in the *Fatality Information* section in IMPACT matches the information that is in CLASS by coordinating the following:

- The handling of the investigation with the CPI worker.
- The closure of the investigation in IMPACT with CPI staff.

Once the supervisor has approved the investigation in IMPACT, the supervisor must send the investigation to a Complex Investigation Analyst for secondary approval.

The secondary approver then has five days to review, complete a case reading guide, and either approve or reject the investigation in IMPACT.

Upon approval of a fatality investigation, the Complex Investigation Analyst will notify the worker, supervisor, program administrator, and the CID division administrator via email on the same day of the secondary approval.

The Roles of SWI, SI, CPS, and CCI When a Child Dies in a Residential Placement

It is important that CPS staff share the needed information about the deceased child to CCI and or the SI assigned, coordinate information to be updated in IMPACT, and be available for any staffings that are scheduled.

See 5300 Investigations of Fatalities or Near Fatal Incidents

INVESTIGATIONS CLOSED WITHOUT FINAL DEATH DETERMINATION

If an investigation is closed without the Department having a final autopsy or death certificate as requested, the follow-up items are completed by the Child Care Investigations Compliance Analyst:

- Follow-up with the record holder
- Receipt of the record
- Review of record personally and with the case's complex investigation analyst and program administrator
- Update of official case record:
  - Closed staged addendum
  - Uploading the record to neuDocs
  - Closed Stage Notification

This is accomplished by the following tasks being completed:

On the first working day of each month, the compliance analyst assigned with this job duty will run the DFPS report FT_01. Filters will be in place for any fatality for CCL or RCL which are pending for either autopsy results or death finding on a closed investigation.

Those with this field as pending will have follow-up completed by the compliance analyst.

The investigations will be evaluated for the 2810 Child Death Record Request Letter and case documentation. If no request has been sent, then the compliance analyst will submit the request as necessary for the investigation and in compliance with policy and enter documentation to reference this action.

The compliance analyst will make monthly contact with the record holder where the request was sent to check on status.

Once the requested document is received, the analyst will review the record and set a staffing with the case complex investigation analyst and the program administrator for the investigation. If any party is unavailable, the next level supervisor is the designee to review.

This review will consist of evaluating if the information now obtained includes new concerns not previously known or investigated which would rise to the level of concerns for abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

If there are concerns, a new report will be made by the compliance analyst to statewide intake so the allegations can be further investigated. If there are no concerns, the compliance analyst will enter closed stage contacts and the closed stage notification will be sent.

The compliance analyst will also update the fatality information portion in IMPACT to reflect accurate information. To update the *Fatality Information* on the Person Detail Page, a Data Correction is required by calling IT Help desk and requesting that Preliminary results be changed to Final, and Pending autopsy be changed to Received:

The record will be preserved in neuDocs as part of the permanent case record.

Reference:

2810 Child Death Record Request Letter

4721.2 Required Notification When Changes Are Made to a Closed Investigation

2957 Notification of Changes Made to a Child Care Investigation Report

SUPPORTIVE SUPERVISION WHEN NOTIFIED OF THE CHILD FATALITY

Secondary trauma is very common in child protection work, particularly when a critical incident such as a child fatality occurs with a family who was known to the caseworker. Secondary trauma must be addressed to help support staff. Managers are expected to help staff process the traumatic event and address their own individual response about the child fatality. The management response needed can range from a check-in by the manager to see how the staff is doing, modified duty, to allowing the worker to take time off.

All staff who were assigned to an open case in which a new incident of abuse or neglect resulted in the child's death must be provided with information about the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Regional management may also provide EAP information to other staff affected by the fatality as needed.

Additionally, if needed, the program administrator should work with EAP to have a debriefing session for staff that worked with the family prior to the child fatality as well as the child fatality investigation. This debriefing session should be specifically for the staff that worked with the family and not open for all staff.