

Pinellas case worker fired over foster child's death

In January, Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri owned up to his office's failures after a 5-year-old Clearwater girl died days after investigators pulled her out of a dysfunctional home and put her into foster care.

Elizabeth Holder and her 2-year-old sister were supposed to have received a medical screening within 72 hours, but that never happened. She died unexpectedly on Jan. 19, eight days after being taken out of her home at the Gulf to Bay Mobile Home Park.

Friday, Gualtieri announced the results of an internal investigation over the bureaucratic oversights surrounding Elizabeth's death. The investigation concluded that Pamela Wilson, a family support worker in the Child Protection Investigations Division, had intentionally omitted and misrepresented the facts of what happened during the investigation and failed to enter notes regarding Elizabeth's removal from her home.

Wilson was fired Tuesday.

Investigators removed Elizabeth from her home after she was found running around the mobile home park where she lived while her mother was under the influence of a combination of drugs, authorities said. Days later, as the girl was sitting on a couch in Dunedin watching TV with her sister and other children, she grabbed her head in pain, crying, "It hurts. It hurts. It hurts." Then she fell limp and died.

An autopsy later determined Elizabeth died of endocardial fibrosis, a heart condition, and a contributing condition of tonsillitis, according to the sheriff's office.

Wilson was supposed to make sure Holder received a medical screening within 72 hours. A variety of factors kept that from happening, the investigation concluded. Among other reasons, investigators concluded it was unclear who was supposed to ensure children were screened within 72 hours and that there wasn't an adequate system for documenting the screenings.

The investigation concluded other children hadn't received timely medical screenings, though none of those children suffered any harm because of the oversights. Investigators were unable to determine whether not having Elizabeth screened contributed to her death.

Gulatieri said Friday that protocols had been put in place to ensure children receive timely screenings and to deal with the other problems the investigation uncovered.