

They "Erred on the Side of the Child" -- Some Case Histories

Opponents of family preservation have a lot of great applause lines. They are for "child protection," they say. They are for "children's rights," they say. They are for "putting children first instead of families first," they say. And over and over they tell us they're "erring on the side of the child."

But in the name of "child protection" children have been beaten. In the name of "children's rights," children have been raped. And in the name of "erring on the side of the child," children have been murdered. These are the stories of some of those children:

Rose and Rodney Hunsicker battled family policing officials for years to keep custody of their daughter Susan and her siblings. Their lawyer says they were unemployed but just needed some help to be better parents. Instead, the county family policing agency "erred on the side of the child" and fought aggressively to remove the children. They succeeded.

In the name of "child protection," they defended Susan's "children's rights" by placing her with a foster mother who helped her husband rape the girl. After the first rapist was convicted, she hooked up with a boyfriend whom

she helped rape the girl again - and torture her, and murder her. Sara's body was packed in cat litter and stashed in an attic for four months. Then the body was dismembered and the remains dumped in the woods. The body was found on Halloween, 2016.

The foster mother worked for the private foster care agency that approved her as a foster parent – and placed Susan and a sibling in her home. She even was allowed to adopt Susan and change her name – that's why she's known in most news accounts as Grace Packer.¹

Authorities in New York City thought Caprice Reid wasn't being properly supervised by her mother. So they decided to "put the child first" and put the child in foster care. They made a "child-focused" decision. They "erred on the side of the child." Eleven months after placement in her third foster home, Caprice Reid, then age four, was dead.

Death did not come quickly. She was starved. She was dehydrated. And her body was covered with bruises. Police say she was tied to a chair and beaten with a stick for four days until she could no longer walk.

The foster home was licensed by one of the scores of private agencies that handle foster care for the city in the midst of a sudden shortage of foster home beds caused by the city's decision at that time to effectively abandon family preservation. The home was licensed even though *another* agency had found the home unfit just a few months earlier – and had warned the agency that licensed the home.

About a week before she died, Caprice Reid's mother saw her daughter for the last time. The little girl clung to her mother's neck and said "Don't go, Mommy. I love you."²

When Sara Eyerman of northern California was nineteen-months-old, child protective services was concerned that she wasn't growing fast enough. So they "erred on the side of the child" and placed Sara in a "specialized" foster home.

About six weeks later, Sara began running a 105-degree fever. But the "specialists" in the specialized foster home decided it was o.k. to wait two days before taking her to a doctor. On the way to the doctor's office, Sara

Eyerman died of viral pneumonia.

"She should have been in the hospital two days earlier when she had a 104.8 [degree] temperature," said Sara's mother, Angie. "When she was home, she went to the emergency room if her temperature got over 101. I didn't care if they laughed at me when I got there or not. One time I took her when she was cutting a tooth ... I kept her alive for a year and seven months. They had her for six weeks and three days and she died."³¹

They "Erred on the Side of the Child" (Continued)

Somebody "erred on the side of the child" and placed Corey Greer of Treasure Island, Florida, in a foster home that would later be described by police as "filthy and overcrowded." The home was licensed for four children. By the time Corey Greer died in his crib of dehydration, 12 were living there. The foster mother was convicted of manslaughter and third-degree murder.

Corey Greer might have survived the overcrowding, if only he had been white. According to a witness at the foster mother's trial, the foster mother said that touching black children "just gives me the willies." According to the witness, the foster mother referred to Corey Greer as "a big black blob."⁴

And if anyone is tempted to dismiss this horror because it happened long ago: Something strikingly similar [just happened again](#) in late 2021.⁵ And *USA Today* Network Florida reporters have documented that the state family policing agency [routinely ignores abuse in foster care](#).⁶

In Los Angeles County, the family policing agency apparently thinks anyone from Latin America speaks Spanish. But, [as the Los Angeles Times explains](#), in the case of a little boy named Andreas F. and his mother "[They] speak an Indigenous Guatemalan language, and social workers failed to effectively communicate with the birth mother" according to the boy's aunt.

But who cares about communication when you're "erring on the side of the child"? So in April, caseworkers made a "child-focused" decision and rushed the boy into foster care.

In late October, 2021, the boy was rushed to a hospital. He's in a coma. The foster mother is under arrest.

[The family's lawyer says](#) "There's clear evidence he was tortured and beaten into a coma."

A County Supervisor, Hilda Solis, "said the tragedy 'probably could have been prevented had we done a better job of assessing the young child and really understanding his cultural and linguistic abilities and our lack in terms of staff understanding what that meant.'"

Meanwhile, Andreas' own family is not even allowed to visit him in the hospital.⁷

When child protective services took four-year-old Jamie Mayne from his father, they never bothered to tell his mother, Marie Panos, who was not living with the man. The mother was never accused of abusing or neglecting the boy. But after she found out about the removal two days later and offered to care for him, authorities in California refused. They decided to make a "child-focused" decision, to "put the child first," to "err on the side of the child" by placing Jamie with a stranger.

"I went up to them to get my children, and they said they're in the system now and I had to do a case plan in order to get my kids back," Panos said.

But a jury in Visalia, California found that while Panos was working on her "case plan," Jamie was being tortured and murdered by his foster mother. He died of a collapsed heart, a ruptured small bowel and an abdominal hemorrhage. There were more than 40 bruises on his body.

"It's hard because I can't pick him up and kiss him," Panos said at the foster mother's trial. "All I have is a headstone to look at instead of his beautiful face."⁸

Of course, most foster parents don't harm the children in their care - but most birth parents don't either. The case against family preservation has been fueled by "horror stories." It's important to remember that there are horror stories in foster care -- and family preservation has the better track record. More examples of the harm done to children in the name of "erring on the side of the child" can be found in [Issue Paper 6](#).

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1. For full details and links to sources, [see these posts to the NCCPR Child Welfare Blog](#). //2. Rachel Swarns, "Agency Was Warned About Foster Mother Charged in Girl's Death," *The New York Times*, July 2, 1997, p.B3; Michelle McPhee et. al., "Two Charged in Foster Death" *New York Daily News*, July 2, 1997, p.17. //3. Kent Pollock, "The Child Protectors: Innocent Suffer in War to Protect," *Sacramento Bee*, August 3, 1986, p.1 //4. Diana Smith, "Foster Baby's Death Spurs Corrective Action by State," Associated Press Dec. 8, 1985, "Race Issue Raised in Baby's Death," United Press International, Oct. 22, 1986, "Woman Faces Seven Years in Foster Child's Death," Associated Press, June 13, 1988. //5. Suzanne Hirt and Emily Walker, "[Florida foster mom charged with killing 4-year-old faced abuse allegation 4 months earlier](#)," *USA Today*, Nov. 1, 2021, //6. Suzanne Hirt, "[Florida confirms flaws with handling of child welfare complaints following USA TODAY story](#)," Oct. 13, 2021. //7. Jacyln Cosgrove, "[L.A. County to investigate alleged abuse of 4-year-old by his foster mother](#)," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov. 17, 2021, John Cádiz Klemack, "[Foster Mother Charged as 4-Year-Old Boy is in Coma](#)" NBC Los Angeles, Nov. 9, 2021. //8. Jennifer M. Fitzenberger, "Visalia woman gets life for death of 4-year-old foster son," *Fresno Bee*, Sept. 12, 2001, p.B1; Jennifer M. Fitzenberger, "Convicted foster mom's 'a good mother,'" *Fresno Bee*, May 24, 2001, p.A1.