

MARION COUNTY CORONER'S OFFICE
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P R E S S R E L E A S E

Wednesday, September 6th, 2023

On August 10, 2023, at 0640 a.m., Marion County Coroner Troy Cannon was notified of the death of a female child at Salem Township Hospital. The child was reportedly traveling with her parents on a chartered tour bus from Brownsville, Texas to Chicago, IL under the Operation Lone Star migrant relocation program.

The child had reportedly begun experiencing mild symptoms and began feeling ill as the family boarded the bus in Brownsville. At that point, she had a low-grade fever only, and was allowed to board the bus. During the trip, her symptoms worsened, and developed into vomiting, diarrhea, lack of appetite, and dehydration. She was given nourishing electrolyte drinks from supplies on the bus. Another passenger with a child had a thermometer, and it was used at some point to take this child's temperature, which showed as 100.1 degrees. Further into the trip, the child's condition worsened yet, and she began having difficulty breathing.

At about the 128 mile-marker of Interstate 57, the mother discovered the child was unconscious and unresponsive, and the bus pulled to the side of the highway. A security guard on the bus called 911 and reported the situation. The call was received by the Salem Police Department 911 Center, and Kinmundy/Alma Fire and EMS personnel were dispatched, along with an Advanced Life Support unit from United Medical Response, based in Salem.

Units from Kinmundy/Alma arrived quickly, removed the child and her parents from the bus and immediately began resuscitation efforts on the way to the hospital. The ALS unit from United intercepted them enroute, and began administering more specialized care and quickly transported the three of them to the local emergency department. Resuscitation efforts continued, but were unsuccessful. The child was pronounced deceased at 0636 a.m. by the attending ER physician.

The bus continued northward to its destination in the Chicago area.

The deceased child and her parents all originally migrated from Venezuela, entering the United States at the Brownsville entry and processing facility. Her parents identified her as 3 year, 11-month-old Jismary Alejandra Barboza Gonzalez. Investigation into the circumstances of her death was immediate, is ongoing, and being conducted by Coroner Cannon, the Southern Illinois Child Death Task Force, and the Illinois Department of Public Health.

An autopsy was performed on August 11, 2023, at the McLean County Regional Autopsy Facility in Bloomington, Illinois, by Board Certified Forensic Pathologist Dr. J. Scott Denton.

After completion of the autopsy examination with multiple additional ancillary studies, the cause of death was determined to be bacterial *Shigella Flexneri* Colitis and Aspiration Pneumonia along with diarrhea and vomiting, which caused electrolyte abnormalities and swelling of the brain. Notably PCR viral testing was also positive for norovirus and rotavirus in the intestine and RSV in the lungs, which indicates exposure to these viruses. These contagious viruses can also cause diarrhea and respiratory illness. Ms. Gonzales showed no evidence of trauma, tumor, or congenital disorder, she was born 2 months premature. Her extremely low weight and length for her age at 0.2 and 1.2 growth percentiles per the World Health Organization Child Growth Standards was a significant contributing factor in her death.

Public health departments and any other agencies involved with Ms. Gonzales prior to her death, and those who were in close quarters with her should be made aware of these multiple infectious disease findings and her cause of death.

No further information will be released by this office.

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Troy D, Cannon, Coroner
Marion County, Illinois