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TOXIC EXPOSURES

Their Babies Died Suddenly in Their Sleep. Police Are Charging the Parents With Felonies for Not Placing Infants on Their Backs

Pennsylvania authorities brought felony charges against the parents of two different babies after police said the infants died because the parents placed them in unsafe sleeping positions, SpotlightPA reported. The deaths were ruled accidental, but police allege the parents failed to follow "Safe to Sleep" guidance, which states that babies should be put to sleep on their backs.

by **Brenda Baletti, Ph.D.**

JUNE 6, 2025



Photo credit: David Strause GoFundMe page.

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Parents of two different babies are being charged with felonies in Pennsylvania after police say their babies died because the parents placed them in unsafe sleeping positions, **SpotlightPA reported.**

In both cases, police allege that the parents failed to follow guidance, including handouts given to them at doctor's visits, stating that babies should be put to sleep on their backs.

Gina and **David Strause** of Lebanon County are accused of putting their 3-month-old infant son, Gavin, to sleep on his stomach and allowing him to sleep with stuffed animals in the crib.

They are charged with involuntary manslaughter, recklessly endangering another person, and endangering the welfare of children.

Natalee Rasmus of Luzerne County is accused of putting her 1-month-old daughter, Avaya Jade Rasmus-Alberto, to sleep on her stomach on a **boppy pillow**, often used for nursing. She is **charged** with third-degree murder, involuntary manslaughter and endangering the welfare of children.

Rasmus was a 17-year-old mother when her daughter died in 2022. Court records show that she continues to be held at the Luzerne County Correctional Facility with bail set at \$25,000 pending resolution of her case.

In both cases, autopsies **concluded** the babies died of accidental death from asphyxiation. Law enforcement argued in both cases that parents should have known that putting the babies to sleep on their stomachs was unsafe, because they had received paperwork at wellness visits informing them of safe sleeping practices.

They pointed to signed **acknowledgements** in the babies' medical records that were created as part of a 2010 state **law** to educate parents about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

The law requires hospitals, birthing centers and medical providers to give parents educational materials from the national **Safe to Sleep campaign**, and ask them to certify that they received them.

Signing the statement is voluntary. The statement doesn't indicate that parents can be charged with a criminal offense if they don't follow the campaign advice.

Advocates from national organizations that educate parents about safe sleep practices found the charges shocking. Nancy Maruyama, the executive director of **Sudden Infant Death Services of Illinois** told **Spotlight PA**, "To charge them criminally is a crime, because

they have already suffered the worst loss.”

Alison Jacobson, executive director of **First Candle**, a nonprofit that also educates parents about safe sleep practices, told **Pennlive**, “There is no law against placing a baby on his or her stomach to sleep. How they can charge this family with involuntary manslaughter is completely baffling to me.”

Researcher **Neil Z. Miller**, an expert on SIDS and the Safe to Sleep campaign, told The Defender, “Parents of a sleeping baby who dies in the middle of the night should never be charged with murder. That’s just cruel.”

Miller, author of “**Vaccines: Are They Really Safe and Effective?**” added:

“Should parents be obligated to follow every ‘recommendation’ made by their doctor or the Safe to Sleep campaign? Would we as a society prefer that doctors raise our babies instead of the parents? Have other possible causes of death been considered, such as vaccinations? As a society, we can, and must, do much better.”

Does placing infants on their backs make a difference?

The handouts shared with new Pennsylvania parents are based on the National Institutes of Health “**Safe to Sleep**” campaign, which institutionalized a program initiated by the **American Academy of Pediatrics** (AAP) in 1992 to inform parents to put children to sleep on their backs rather than on their stomachs.

The campaign is based on the premise that babies who sleep on their backs or sides are less likely to die in their sleep. Until that time, it was common for babies to sleep on their stomachs.

The program was launched in the wake of a rising number of SIDS deaths — and growing concern among some parents that the deaths were linked to vaccination.

In a 2021 article in the peer-reviewed journal **Toxicology Reports**, vaccine researcher **Neil Z. Miller** provides a history of the SIDS diagnosis, noting that the rise of SIDS coincided with the first **mass immunization campaigns**.

Between 1992, when the Safe to Sleep program launched, and 2001, **SIDS deaths reportedly declined** a whopping 55% — a **number touted** in articles celebrating the program, making it appear that babies sleeping on their stomachs was the cause of SIDS, not vaccines.

However, at the same time deaths from SIDS decreased, the rate of mortality from “suffocation in bed,” “suffocation other,” “unknown and unspecified causes,” and “intent unknown” all increased significantly.

Why? The classification system had changed. SIDS deaths were being reclassified by medical certifiers, usually coroners, as one of the other similar categories, not SIDS.

Research published in the journal **Pediatrics**, the AAP's flagship journal, concluded that deaths previously certified as SIDs were simply being certified as other non-SIDS causes, such as suffocation — but the deaths were still essentially SIDS deaths.

That change in classification accounted for more than 90% of the drop in SIDS rates.

The Pediatrics paper showed no decline in overall postneonatal mortality after the Safe to Sleep campaign was launched, despite the program's — and the AAP's — claims to the contrary.

Others verified the Pediatrics paper's findings, and the trend continued, as reported by **multiple studies in top journals**. Miller reported that, for example, "From 1999 through 2015, the U.S. SIDS rate declined 35.8% while infant deaths due to accidental suffocation increased 183.8%."

Research shows that almost **80% of SIDS deaths** reported to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) happen within seven days of vaccination.

Theories linking vaccines to SIDS suggest that, in some cases, **underdeveloped liver enzyme pathways** may make it harder for some infants to process **toxic ingredients** in vaccines. Others argue that other, **multiple, complex factors** can make some infants vulnerable to toxic ingredients in **vaccines**.

Baby Gavin was 'a dream come true'

On April 30, Gina and David Strause were charged with involuntary manslaughter, which carries a sentence of up to 10 years, and other lesser charges in the death of their son Gavin.

According to the **police report**, Gina found her son unresponsive, cold and blue in his crib when she woke up to feed him on the morning of May 8, 2024. She immediately called 911 and performed CPR until the police arrived.

The baby was pronounced dead at the hospital. The autopsy report found the cause of death to be "complications of asphyxia."

Police said they observed loose items in the crib, "such as blankets and stuffed animals."

Gina said that after feeding her baby at about 11:30 the night before he died, she placed him in his crib on his belly, because he was a "belly sleeper," and covered him with a blanket. She said that she had received the recommendation that he should sleep on his back, but that he preferred to sleep on his stomach.

In an **interview with Pennlive**, Gina said that she typically put Gavin to sleep on his back, but he had gotten into the daily habit of rolling onto his belly.

Davis Stause told police that when he left for work at 5:30 am, he checked on Gavin, who was sleeping on his stomach and moving around a little bit. David said he “patted his butt” to put him back to sleep.

The police reported that they also obtained medical records from birth through death that showed that on the discharge paperwork that the parents received information about safe sleep practices, which included putting the baby on its back, having it sleep in the same room as the parents, and keeping the crib clear of bumper pads and stuffed animals.

They said this paperwork explained how parents could create a safe sleeping environment for their babies to reduce the risk of SIDS.

Baby Gavin also went to the pediatrician for well-child visits on Feb. 7 and 14, March 5 and April 9, a month before he died.

Gina told Pennlive that Gavin, who was born when she was almost 40, was “a dream come true.” She had taken 10 weeks of maternity leave and largely worked at home to spend as much time with him as possible. She said that after she gave birth, she was “overwhelmed” and didn’t remember receiving any paperwork or instructions about sleep.

Gina also said that at the hospital, police treated her and her husband with immediate suspicion, separating and questioning them. They were not allowed to see their baby again before he was taken by the coroner’s office.

The parents created a **GoFundMe page**, where they shared a copy of the police report, to help cover their legal costs, because they said they do not qualify for a public defender.

The Defender attempted to contact the parents to inquire about the baby’s overall health, if he had any medical conditions, was born prematurely or had recently received any vaccines, but the parents did not respond by deadline.

The district attorney’s office also did not respond to requests for comment.

‘Tragic accident with no criminal intent to harm or kill the baby’

The forensic pathologist who performed the autopsy for Natalee Rasmus’ baby listed the cause of death as accidental. According to the report, the baby died from asphyxiation, the **Times Leader reported**.

Rasmus discovered her baby had died on the morning of Oct. 23, 2022, when she picked her up to get her ready for a doctor’s appointment.

Pennsylvania State Police in December charged Rasmus, alleging that she placed her baby face down to sleep against the recommendations of medical personnel and prenatal classes at Geisinger Wyoming Valley Medical Center.

At a preliminary hearing on the case in February, a state trooper testified that Rasmus ignored safe sleeping practices because she had placed her baby face down in her bassinet with a Boppy pillow, which has a tag warning, "Do not use for sleeping."

The trooper, Caroline Rayeski, also testified that a search of Rasmus' cellphone found that she had searched the internet to see whether it was ok to allow newborns to sleep on their stomachs. The trooper also seized literature from the prenatal classes stating it is "recommended" to put newborns to sleep on their backs.

"Yeah, she wouldn't sleep, she'll just scream, so she has to be like propped up," Rasmus told the investigating officer, according to **Spotlight PA**, which reported the story.

Assistant attorneys argued in a preliminary hearing that she disregarded safe sleeping practices, and a judge forwarded the criminal case to county court.

Rasmus is being represented by public defenders Joseph Yeager and Melissa Ann Sulima, who told the Times Leader the baby's death was "a tragic accident with no criminal intent to harm or kill the baby."

Yeager said the prenatal literature referring to newborn sleep positions are "recommendations," not mandates.

"As the death certificate says, it was an accident. Clearly, there was no malice in this accidental death," said Yeager, who also said the case should be dismissed.

Rasmus' most serious charge, third-degree murder, is a homicide that involves killing someone without intent to kill, but with reckless disregard for human life. In Pennsylvania, it can carry a prison sentence of **up to 40 years**.

Court documents indicate that Rasmus remains in jail with a \$25,000 bail, pending the outcome of her case. Neither the district attorney nor Rasmus' attorneys responded to The Defender's request for comment.

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PLEASE DONATE TODAY**How common is it to bring criminal charges against parents in infant deaths?**

Attorney Daniel Nevins told **SpotlightPA** said it is extremely rare for parents to be criminally charged when infants die after sleeping on their stomachs, and that the burden of proof on the prosecutors will be high.

In 2014, Virginia resident Candice Christa Semidey, age 25, was charged with murder after she swaddled her baby and put it to sleep on its stomach, **The Washington Post reported**. In that case, police similarly did not think that she intended for the baby to die.

She **pleaded guilty** to involuntary manslaughter and child neglect. She was ordered to serve three years of probation to avoid the **five-year prison term** she was sentenced to.

Some **charges** have also been brought against **parents** in deaths of infants sleeping with Boppy pillows. There have also been several **cases of parents charged** for sleeping in the **same bed** as their child.

The Defender recently reported on three SIDS deaths that occurred shortly after vaccination. Police are still investigating the parents of **18-month-old twins who died** together a week after receiving three vaccines. Authorities have not yet charged the parents, but initially said they were investigating the deaths as homicides.

Blessings Myrical Jean Simmons, age 6 months, received **six routine vaccines** at a well-baby visit on Jan. 13. The next morning, her parents found the baby dead in her bassinet. The autopsy SIDS as the infant's cause of death, and no charges were filed against the parents.

Related articles in The Defender:

- **Media Slam NIH for Axing 'Safe to Sleep' Campaign — But Evidence Shows the Program Never Reduced SIDS Deaths**
- **'Double Tragedy': Twins' Deaths Likely Caused by Vaccines, Not Parents**
- **Police Detective: 50% of Sudden Infant Deaths Happened Within 48 Hours of Vaccination — But No One Is Allowed to Say It**

**Brenda Baletti, Ph.D.**

Brenda Baletti, Ph.D., is a senior reporter for The Defender. She wrote and taught about capitalism and politics for 10 years in the writing program at Duke University. She holds a Ph.D. in human geography from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a

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Best Newest Oldest**Peggy Nieto**

a day ago

Apparently the police department does not know how to read or has no reading comprehension. Safe to Sleep Guidance is simply that GUIDANCE!!!! It is not the law, so why are there charges? This is ridiculous overreach and the parents are being put through hell when they are grieving the loss of their children.

58 0 Reply **Theodora Bruin** → Peggy Nieto

a day ago

It's up to the district attorney, not the police, to actually charge anyone.

12 0 Reply **Liberallez** → Theodora Bruin

9 hours ago

And... of course ... we know the DA's are all interested in fairness and justice and are not just wanting to pad their profiles!!

2 0 Reply **Peggy Nieto** → Theodora Bruin

an hour ago

They made the arrest. They did the investigation and provided the history from which the crazy charges are derived.

0 0 Reply **Lisa Z** → Peggy Nieto

a day ago

EXACTLY!!

5 0 Reply **Big Cat**



a day ago

Absolute insanity. Big pharma executives and heads of the FDA should be the charged.

54 0 Reply

**TJ**

a day ago

That's crazy! Everyone knows that SIDS is the result of vaccination. So the parents should be suing the doctors the other way around! We live in backwards land.

47 0 Reply

C**cab77**

a day ago

This is horrific. I hope an excellent lawyer steps up and helps these parents. And that teen mom who has been sitting in prison for over 3 years???!!! Absolutely unconscionable. I remember when my son was born, in 99, the advice was to put babies on their stomachs because otherwise they could spit up and choke on it. Then they decided that the back was better. It's all speculation.

38 0 Reply

**ceecee**

cab77

13 hours ago

We were taught the same...it only makes sense that if a baby is on her back and throws up that she will drown...our children did not receive the onslaught of vaccines they do today as infants and they slept on their stomachs in a crib. They did great.

9 0 Reply

B**BB**

ceecee

9 hours ago

I remember back in the early 70's when my son was born the recommended sleeping position was on the side (recovery position)!

1 0 Reply

**Klaus Barbie**

cab77

11 hours ago

They know that if a baby is placed in its back it's more likely to die. It's all part of the depopulation agenda.

1 0 Reply

**Alan**

a day ago

Big Pharma at it again.

37 0 Reply

**Clara Goldberry**



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my grandson almost died after the mmr/rota virus vaccine. within 24 hours he was in the hospital with 4 aneurysms on his heart and a diagnosis of kawasaki disease. until then he was a healthy 6 month old.

4 0 Reply 



ceecee

→ Countrygirl1411

— 

13 hours ago

It's a huge onslaught of vaccines...7 at the time??? A baby! This is INSANITY.

4 0 Reply 

C

Countrygirl1411 → ceecee

— 

11 hours ago

Past insane. Guess they figure if they can't kill them before they are born they will kill them after. I suspect doctors know what they are doing and the dangers of all these injections at one time. Past time they be held responsible and also all those that approve the injections and the schedules at local, state and federal levels.

3 0 Reply 



Britt Lind

— 

a day ago

Vaccine companies are to blame and parents are charged. The world has turned upside down. What will it take for authorities to recognize the obvious cause of death is vaccines? I hope the parents have great lawyers and fight this tooth and nail the sue the doctors for every penny they have.

23 1 Reply 



Charlie Hoyopatubbi

→ Britt Lind

— 

a day ago

Big pharma is in gov.pockets as well.

12 0 Reply 

B

Beatrice → Britt Lind

— 

an hour ago

What authorities? They all already know the connection between vaccines and death but only care about exploiting us for profit. They don't care about anyone's child or children in general. They want to replace us with their ' Stepford ' transhumans.

0 0 Reply 



Irish

→ Britt Lind

— 

12 hours ago

you can hope and lose. the vaccine dealers made sure they cannot be held accountable. to succeed the parents must get a doctor to agree with them. no doctor will stake their livelihood on agreeing with the parents.

0 0 Reply

M

mcwinaz

a day ago

More blue state NUTSERY. I can't believe there would be a jury in the world to convict these parents. But PA authorities will now get their names in headlines which is apparently all they're gunning for..

This is about as sick/twisted as medical professionals in hospitals killing people...

15 0 Reply

**Mourning Warbler**

a day ago

I guess the lawyers are all excited about the money they can make off this. And I guess the doctors, pharmacists, FDA, etc... are all so glad that even though THEY are the murderers, these couples are allowed to be abused in the most monstrous and mendacious way.

14 0 Reply

**Irish** → Mourning Warbler

12 hours ago

no lawyer will attempt it.

0 0 Reply

D

dbj3

a day ago

🙏🙏🙏 for the parents and their babies who died from SIDS. ALL 3 of my babies slept on their tummies so they could move their head if they were to be sick, etc. OK that was years ago, but most parents did the same and SIDS was not very prevalent. Leave these poor sad parents alone and CRACK DOWN ON ALL THE VACCINES IN THE CHILDHOOD SCHEDULE! I pray RFK Jr STOPS them all Really Really SOON! Like yesterday!

10 0 Reply

**Irish** → dbj3

12 hours ago

MR COPPER TOP IS FOIOLING YOU ALL. HE IS JUST ANOTHER CLOWN PANDERING . HE HAS NO AUTHORITY.

0 2 Reply

**boxerdoglover**

a day ago

What in the heck is going on with the police! This is insane. And it more than likely from their vaccines

10 0 Reply 

B

Beatrice → boxerdoglover— 

4 hours ago

Big pharma influences a lot of legislators who then inform the local governments on how to handle specific incidents. Always look to the local governments to see who the elected officials are and what their 'top agenda' was or is.

1 0 Reply 

K

katou— 

a day ago

And you can abort a baby up until birth. That's not murder. But the baby, most likely killed by killer injections is gaslighted to, "You put the damn baby on his stomach to sleep again you murdering parents." Ok, I get it now smdh.

12 1 Reply 

J

jbbigf— 

a day ago

Maybe they had something with "Defund the Police". In Pennsylvania, anyway.

10 1 Reply **Irish** → jbbigf— 

12 hours ago

defund REFERS TO ENDING MILITARY GRADE WEAPONS FOR LOCAL COPS FOOL.

0 1 Reply 

L

LinUK— 

18 hours ago

There are no words to describe how evil this world has become.

6 0 Reply **Molly Malone**— 

11 hours ago

Seriously?

Back when I was having and raising my children, you know, when we rode dinosaurs to school according to my daughter, the recommendation was the opposite. Put babies to sleep in their stomachs in case they spit up in the night, so they won't aspirate and choke to death. The mattress should be firm, no pillows or stuffed toys. AND there was no paper to read, and certainly nothing to sign. A nurse simply told us.

Friends, if your hospital makes you sign anything, read it all first and if you don't understand even one sentence, make them explain it to you until you do understand – and if you make a nuisance of yourself, who cares? Your life, your health, your baby, your family.

We really are living in Dystopia!

5 0 Reply 

B

Beatrice → Molly Malone

an hour ago

Evil dystopia

0 0 Reply ↗

**rjoguillory**

a day ago

...corrupt government running interference for Big Pharma. Perhaps we should lay charges against the DA, The Judge and the corrupt Police who know that it is the poisonous vaccines that cause SIDS, but can't allow the thruth to emerge or they lose the \$\$\$ Big Pharma has provided.

5 0 Reply ↗

**Seabreezes1**

8 hours ago edited

For heaven's sake! My kids would NOT sleep on their backs. I'd put a hot water bottle on their mattress shortly before putting them to bed during cold weather, removing the hot water bottle before easing them onto the warm spot on their tummies.

They had a stuffed toy or two in the corners of their crib. When they were old enough to reach the toys, they were mature enough to be safe with them. Otherwise, they could just look at them like they'd look at a mobile. The sweet smiley toy faces were calming for them.

I also used a lightweight baby blanket and a night cap in addition to dressing them in a warm sleeper on cold nights. The cap is the only thing that worried me a little. But the hospitals put them in a cap to keep them warm.

Tell me, how is taking measures to keep your baby warm and content during the night criminal?

The AAP and DPH are the criminals!

4 0 Reply ↗

B

Beatrice → Seabreezes1

an hour ago

When can I move in? You make me wish that I was your baby :D We're never too old for a smiley stuffy, warm blanky, hot water bottle and lots of tender love are we?

0 0 Reply ↗

**Liberallez**

9 hours ago

If someone can be arrested and charged because they didn't follow some arbitrary "guidelines" then the Commissars have won and we are living in a Police State and the Constitution is dead!!!

4 0 Reply ↗

**solatle**

**Scaturo**

a day ago

End all jab mandates! Freeeeedommmmm!

4 0 Reply

G**Grellis**

20 hours ago

This is sadism. It isn't enough that Governments, Big Pharma and the medical establishment murder these children and the hopes and dreams of young families they also have to punish the victims to accentuate their status as the supposedly guilty, in order to hide their crimes. Deeply pathological, evil.

3 0 Reply

**THanX-1138**

a day ago

Isn't it ironic that parents who leave loaded guns around the house are seldom charged with anything after a shooting.

6 2 Reply

**Mourning Warbler**

→ THanX-1138

a day ago

Isn't it ironic that when LEOs accidentally shoot someone, "it's just one of those things"?

7 0 Reply

M**Meave G.**

a day ago

I wonder what their aluminum levels were. I hope the medical examiners checked.

4 1 Reply

W**Wildflower**

14 hours ago

The vaccines killed those children.... The pharmaceuticals are deflecting the blame. The police should be arrested for being dumb a##es

2 0 Reply

D**Paul Hastilow**