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MELINDA HENNEBERGER

After abuse accusation tears Kansas family apart, parents mourn time lost with kids | Opinion

By **Melinda Henneberger**

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Brian Boxx with his wife, Sarah Goble, their son Finnik, her older daughter Sawyer and her mother, Kim Goble, outside the Johnson County Courthouse. Emily Curiel ecuriel@kcstar.com



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When Sarah Goble and her husband Brian Boxx celebrated their son Finnik's first birthday last weekend at a park near their home in Mission, Kansas, they weren't just helping him blow out the candle on his funfetti cake. They were looking back on the blown-apart year they spent being accused of child abuse — specifically, of

causing a number of “suspected,” “probable” and healing fractures in bones that at the time were the width of two toothpicks.

Some of these, as it turned out, were not fractures at all. And all were asymptomatic, meaning that there’s no evidence they ever caused any pain. According to Finn’s pediatric records, he was healthy and thriving both before and after the regular two-month check-up he had just days before his parents brought him to the ER at Children’s Mercy Hospital on the they-wish-they’d-stayed-home morning of Oct. 2, 2024.

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“The fractures were discovered incidentally during a workup for vomiting,” pediatric radiologist Julie Mack wrote in her expert opinion for Finn’s family, which called the abuse finding incorrect. None of these “appear to have produced noticeable symptoms. These findings are consistent with a single minor force event, such as a fall in the arms of a sibling.”

Another Mercy test — something called a nasopharyngoscopy — later found a small lesion in the back of the baby’s throat, most likely the result of a virus, and why he’d been unable to nurse the previous night, according to a second expert opinion offered by Finn’s family. Finn had a slight fever when his parents brought him in. But Mercy doctors saw this abrasion, too, as evidence of abuse: They said Finn’s throat must have been intentionally lacerated.

The narrative that the Kansas Department for Children and Families caseworker and Mission police settled on, according to Goble and Boxx, was that Finn’s father had not only broken his child’s bones on purpose by, as per the child abuse pediatricians, “smooshing, squeezing or pulling,” but must have stuck his finger down his son’s throat with the intention of slicing him with his fingernail some time between 8 p.m. and midnight the evening before his parents brought Finn to Mercy.

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That last part doesn't line up with hospital records, since the Mercy ENT who examined the baby said the abrasion had been healing somewhere between several days and a week. He was eating again the next day, as soon as he was cleared to do so.

But Goble said police and the DCF investigator, who interrogated her together, told her, "We know what happened; you need to admit it." When she said her husband was a gentle person who hadn't gotten home from work until after 8 and hadn't been alone with the baby that night, "they got very mad. That's when they started saying" they were going to take her 9-year-old daughter, too. And they did.

Here's The Est Walk-in Showe

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Criminal charges were never filed, and if you'd read the 321 pages of his Children's Mercy Hospital records obtained by Goble, and the searing pushback in the two expert opinions submitted on behalf of the parents, maybe you'd doubt, as I do, that anyone ever abused this boy.



Sarah Goble holds son Finn. *Melinda Henneberger*

Judge told baby hospitalized for serious injuries

Mercy child abuse pediatricians quickly decided Finn had been abused. But what the family court judge was told, in a petition written by the DCF investigator, did not even accurately reflect what's in the hospital records. If the only information I'd been given was what she was handed, I'd have removed Finn and his sister from their home for 179 days, too.

During the week that Finn spent in Children's Mercy, according to his records, the treatment he got was this: just-in-case IV fluids on the first day, and Tylenol on the last, right after he'd been separated from his mother.

The judge read in the DCF investigator's petition that the baby had been hospitalized for a week as a result of his serious physical injuries caused by abuse — which was simply not true. As his hospital records clearly state, he was cleared for release on the second day and after that, was being held there while they figured out where he should go after the abuse diagnosis.

Heather Kirkwood is a nationally known expert on the false diagnosis of child abuse. Before her first such case more than 25 years ago, she told me, "I was a perfectly

sensible antitrust lawyer. But I couldn't believe" there was no solid science behind many convictions.

She examined Finn's records for his family and noted six different ways in which Mercy's findings differ from the way they were presented by DCF to the court in the petition that resulted in Goble and Boxx's immediate loss of custody. "I was struck by the fact that the claims in the petition were contrary to the medical records that the parents obtained from the hospital," she wrote.

For example, she wrote: "The petition noted 'bruising' in different locations but the records indicate that redness appeared and disappeared in various locations throughout his hospital stay, which suggest sensitive skin rather than trauma."

The petition also said that Goble, an account supervisor for a design agency who turns 37 today, on July 20, and Boxx, a 35-year-old personal trainer, weren't married. That wasn't true, either. Was the petition that questioned Boxx's paternity meant to make his guilt seem more likely, as someone who might only be passing through their lives? Goble said she believes this was no minor matter in the eyes of the court.



The petition was written by someone who is no longer with DCF. But the petition is still the basis of everything that's followed. And the hospital records the petition was based on are themselves contradictory.



Brian Boxx, left, walks with his wife Sarah Goble, their children Finnik and Sawyer, and Sarah's mother, Kim Goble. Emily Curiel ecuriel@kcstar.com

The problem: no 2nd opinion

The problem is not that child abuse pediatricians at Mercy and elsewhere find abuse, which not only exists but is still too often overlooked. Instead, it's that once that's suspected, that suspicion can effectively end rather than only begin the medical investigation, and in many cases the criminal one.

Goble's defense attorney, Cheryl Pilate, said in a statement: "With due respect to doctors who focus on the safety of children, I have strong concerns about a medical

specialty that was created specifically to serve the needs of law enforcement and the courts. The purpose of these special units is not merely to identify injuries, but to identify whether they were ‘non-accidental,’ i.e. abuse. This can be a dubious proposition when underlying or inherited conditions can sometimes play a significant or causal role. A false accusation of abuse can be totally devastating to a family and a child.”

There are still as we [all know too many actual cases of abuse](#) — of worried neighbors who call and call hotlines and authorities and nothing is done until it’s too late. I’ve written often about all kinds of abuse — [on campus](#), [in the military](#), [in the church](#) and [in the family](#), and there is no betrayal deeper than that last.

Yet there are also too many cases like Finn’s that do so much unnecessary harm to families, based solely on the word of abuse specialists who although they are not always right, are never officially wrong.

The latter group is taking up resources that should be focused on the former. So what should be done?

“Before they take our kids away,” says Goble, “we at least need to be able to get the second opinion that we can’t get, because they won’t even give us our records.” That does not seem unreasonable to me.

Of course we should err on the side of protecting children. But that is not at odds with getting a second opinion. In fact, the true protection of children should require a timely second look.

I asked Mercy's senior manager for media relations, Lisa Augustine, about this via email. I told her that "what the parents are asking is the opportunity for a second, independent medical opinion before their kids are taken away, only they can't get that because they can't even get the (hospital) records. That does not seem unreasonable to me as a way to protect both children and families."

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And here was her statement in response:

"As health care providers and mandated reporters, we are focused on the care and safety of the children we serve and are required by law to report if there is any reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect.

“Ultimately, the decision to remove a child from their parents’ custody is made by Child Protective Services (CPS) and the courts. Additional evaluation and access to medical records are provided at the direction of the current custodian. We recognize that these are difficult situations.”

That is all true, but the courts base their decisions on those of the child abuse pediatricians, who work closely with police and prosecutors and testify in court. And Mercy’s response does not address the possibility of a second opinion before removal.

Even after that happens, when the current custodian, the state, does not direct the hospital to release records, then what is the parent supposed to do? The hospital’s initial finding does control the process, so all of this is circular. And who is considering the fallout from a wrongful removal? Since as we know the interruption of mother-child attachment could hardly be more consequential, someone should be.

Right now, it would also be all but impossible for Mercy’s child abuse clinic to be successfully sued for hotlining anyone, because mandated reporters of abuse who believe themselves to be acting in a child’s best interest are free from liability.

That, too, is a good thing, up to a point. But parents naturally feel that freedom from liability is too broadly applied when it covers not just those who report but those who also investigate and diagnose the abuse they just reported, and then testify about it.



Sarah Goble holds her son Finn timer. Emily Curiel ecuriel@kcstar.com

The 'severe malnutrition' that wasn't

Finn arrived at Mercy at 9 a.m. on Oct. 2, and by 12:11 p.m., after a bone scan showed a number of suspected fractures in his tiny wrist and ribs, they decided that this “constellation of findings is highly suspicious for nonaccidental trauma,” or intentionally inflicted child abuse. After that, if any possibility other than abuse was

ever considered, it's not in the records. "Reason for consultation: Nonaccidental trauma."

At 2:13 p.m. that same day, Mercy conducted a "child life stress assessment." This assessment noted that the baby was "calmed with encouragement, calmed with positive touch, distracted with sensory items and participated with parent/caregiver assistance." Yet it nevertheless concluded that 2-month-old Finn had a stress level of 4 out of 5, due to "ineffective coping and/or inconsistent family support."

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On Oct. 5, records show his nutrition assessment "indicates severe malnutrition" which was "related to fractures as evidenced by patient not meeting 80% of calorie needs since admission" three days earlier.

Only, the record later reflects that measuring his weight at the 5th percentile and length at the 100th percentile — welcome to the NBA, Finny — was “likely not accurate.” This big boy was not malnourished, and was only briefly thought to have been because someone at Mercy measured his length incorrectly.

At one point, the Mercy records also describe Finn as “an otherwise healthy female, brought into the ER by her mother.”

Nobody, including the doctors at Mercy’s child abuse clinic, is infallible.

And without any real checks and balances, families can fall through a trapdoor and land in a branch of the medical and legal system in which there’s really only the appearance of due process because the opinion of the child abuse pediatrician from a respected hospital like Mercy is effectively the only opinion. Is there any system or institution in which that wouldn’t lead to problems?

I did get Don Hymer, the Johnson County child abuse prosecutor in Goble and Boxx’s case, on the phone, and asked him if he’d ever known Mercy to have gotten a child abuse diagnosis wrong. He said he was not a spokesman for the office, and recommended that I call District Attorney Steve Howe, who did not respond.

Kirkwood, the Seattle expert for Goble and Boxx, told me when I called her that a “constellation” of fractures and other findings that can’t be felt by the child or seen by the parents, other than when they’re found incidentally through testing, have replaced “shaken baby syndrome” as the most common child abuse diagnosis.

“It used to be that most abuse cases were ‘shaken baby syndrome,’ and as that came to be questioned — as the foundations collapsed — they moved into ‘constellations’ of things found incidentally with no symptoms, like fractures you’d never have known were there and are self-healing. Radiology can be a two-edged sword.”

Child abuse pediatricians dispute that they changed the name of “shaken baby syndrome” because the science behind it was discredited. [It absolutely wasn’t, they still insist.](#) But after a 2008 Wisconsin appeals court ruling that “a shift in mainstream medical opinion” threw that diagnosis into question, the preferred and more inclusive term did become “abusive head trauma” way back in 2009.

Abuse specialists **push back hard on any “denialist”** who questions them, and have **equated doing so with facilitating child abuse.**



Sarah Goble and her husband Brian Boxx challenge an abuse accusation that removed their children, pushing for the right to second medical opinions. Emily Curiel ecuriel@kcstar.com

‘Republicans are the ones who care’

The National Registry of Exonerations lists only 35 exonerees whose convictions were “shaken baby” cases; actual innocence is extremely difficult to prove. But so many others accused on that basis are trying to get on that list. Tricia Rojo Bushnell, who has just left the Midwest Innocence Project, told me two years ago that it is routinely “flooded with applications” for shaken baby innocence cases, “mainly because several hospitals in our five-state region are hot spots for diagnosing it.”

I wish this could become a hot spot for making the system meant to protect children fairer with some checks and balances. Unlikely as that seems at this point, the politics of how such cases are handled does make sense.

“I’ve been a hardcore Democrat all my life,” says Goble, who is hoping to testify before lawmakers in Topeka this fall. But as she’s been contacting lawmakers, she’s found that “Republicans are the only ones who care, and it’s because it goes to parental rights.”

Kirkwood is a Canadian who joked that she must be on the far left since she believes in universal health care. Yet when I asked her about Goble’s observation, she said that in her experience, judges in red states tend to look at the evidence in a more commonsense way than in blue states, where it seems to be assumed that to question what a doctor at a respected hospital says is to take the side of child abusers, and what right-minded person would do that?

This is one orthodoxy that does need to be challenged, and if Republicans can for whatever reason see that, more power to them.

This has already happened in Georgia, where in May, [Gov. Brian Kemp signed Ridge’s Law](#), named for [a child wrongfully taken from his parents](#) for many months. It gives parents the legal right to a second medical opinion. The Georgia Department of Human Services has also made important changes, including that doctors must confirm they’ve reviewed a child’s records before deciding that what they’re seeing is the result of abuse.

During the few scary hours on the evening of Oct. 1 in which Finn wouldn’t either nurse or take his bottle, Goble repeatedly called her pediatrician, who was not very worried. After Finn projectile vomited around 3 a.m., the whole family headed to the Saint Luke’s Community Hospital in Roeland Park, then went home and treated Finn

for a cold. But then, at around 6:30, as he was trying to swallow some Tylenol, he stopped breathing for a few seconds, until Goble's mom blew into his mouth. That's when they took him to Children's Mercy.

Saint Luke's had done an x-ray, and along with a lot of gas in his tummy had found an old rib fracture they didn't even mention to his parents. That might have been why the doctors in Mercy's child abuse clinic — the Safety, Care & Nurturing or SCAN Clinic — started looking for other fractures. But then, it might also have been because Goble herself begged them to find out what was wrong with her baby, who hadn't eaten since 8 p.m. and had vomited just that once, some brown bile that looked to her like dried blood.

“We didn’t even have hospital insurance, so everything was going to be out-of-pocket. But I was so worried, I said, ‘Do every test!’”

I asked Kirkwood about my impression, in talking to a number of families in these situations over the last couple of years, that they don’t tend to be the muddling-through moms, but on the contrary the way-on-top-of-it ones. I’m not sure that even I, who once took my son to the ER because he stuck a pea up his nose — the pediatrician laughed, but also said yes, it was possible he could choke — would have taken him in after a single fussy night.

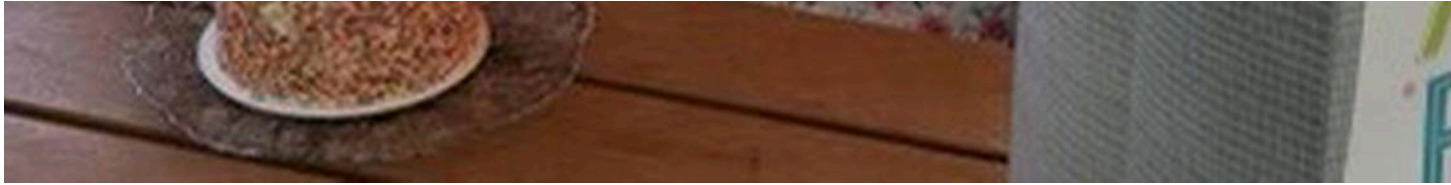
“I wouldn’t have taken my child in for that amount of vomiting,” Kirkwood said. “Most cases I’ve had recently, I might have called my mother. Parents have gotten more and more engaged, and I’ve had a surprising number of (clients who were) doctors accused” of abusing their own children, after doing nothing more than being hypervigilant. “So when they do the tests, they find something.”

Of course, an abuser can look like an angel and vice versa, but again, the point is, pause and find out before taking apart a family in a way that makes the unit we say we treasure so difficult to reassemble.

Multiple nurse’s notes describe Finn during his time in Mercy as “cooing and babbling.” One says, “playing happily with mom and dad.”

On the second day, his family says, they kicked Dad out, and on the third, a guard kicked Finn's "Yaya," Grandma Kim Goble, out of the hospital cafeteria, because she said she was meeting her daughter who was up on the sixth floor, the child abuse floor. The guard accused her of lying about ever having been up there, though the records show that she had been.





Melinda Henneberger

Grandma disqualified, until she wasn't

It was being accused of lying by that guard, she said, along with her refusal to tell the DCF caseworker what she wanted to hear, that disqualified her in the eyes of the state as someone who could take temporary custody of her daughter's children.

Until a month later, that is, when after cycling through three other kinship foster homes, with family friends, the state decided that maybe she wasn't such a danger after all.

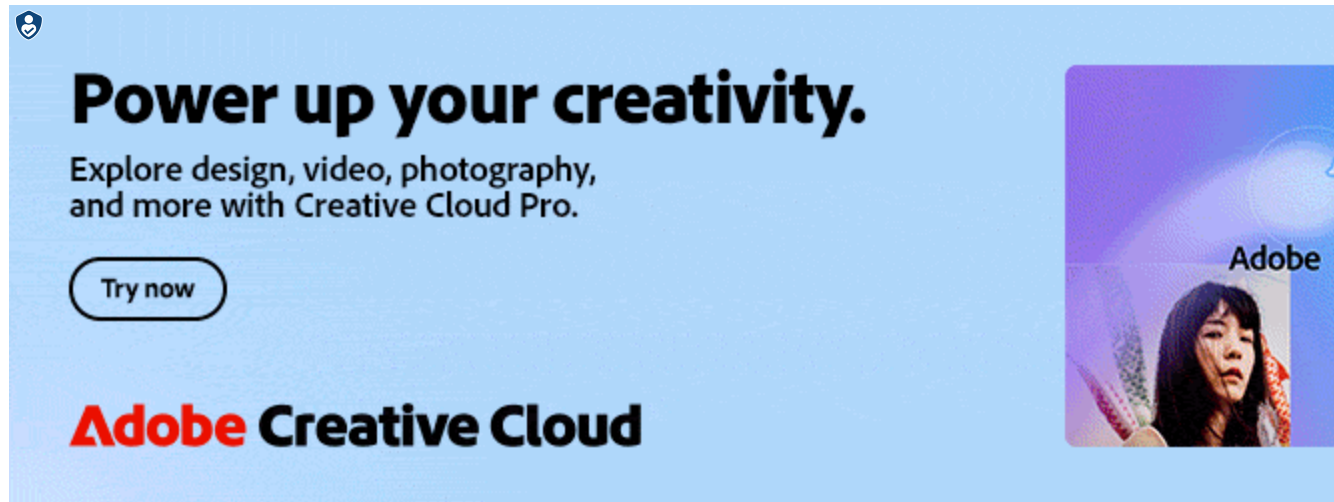
As the former director of [Children's Miracle Network](#) for CoxHealth in Springfield, Kim Goble says, "we saw abuse up close and personal, so I'm really aware" of what a serious problem abuse is. "But it was obvious he had a viral infection — that's why he couldn't swallow — and I couldn't wrap my head around how they came to this conclusion so quickly. We thought that because we didn't do anything, it was going to go away, but we couldn't stop the ball from rolling."

Later, Kim Goble said, police and DCF also found it highly suspicious that she, Finn's parents and 9-year-old sister all told the same story. Obviously, then, the family all says they were told, this narrative had to be one they'd rehearsed.

Finn's mother, who stayed in the hospital room with him, and kept asking when they could go home since he wasn't being treated for anything, said that it was also a nurse who told her that his release plan was that they'd be held there until trial. Trial?

One of the most unsettling aspects of Finn's hospital records is the way they give new meaning to the term, "We're keeping him for observation." In this case, though, it was Goble and at first her husband who were being watched, and their words documented by hospital personnel. In fact, even when those trying to overhear them couldn't make out what they were saying, their "hushed tones" were noted.

If you think there's even a possibility that parents are abusive, then it's only right for the child's protection that they have someone else in the room 24-7. You wouldn't want it to be otherwise.



But these “psychosocial notes” show Mercy very much involved in surveillance as part of building a criminal case. Goble says there were various “babysitters” in the room with her and Finn who told them, “We know you didn’t do this,” yet there aren’t any notes like that included in the record.

Those that are in the file document the parents going over in private conversation how, oh how this could have happened.

The records document both times Goble asked a nurse if anyone would be watching Finn when she had to leave him to go to court on Oct. 9: “Mom then stated that she looked up that it is ‘illegal’ to leave a two month old unattended ... and that it ‘seems ironic that I’m being investigated for being neglectful but he’s going to be neglected while I’m gone.’”

Some other “psychosocial” notes in the hospital records:

“Mom also mentioned to this CA (clinical assistant) that the investigator had asked Grandma about the mark/blemish on her forehead during interviews. Upon hearing this, patient’s father said, ‘Are they trying to insinuate something? As if that’s what we need, for them to think I beat my wife.’”

“Mom was holding the patient in the chair when Grandma came to comfort her. Grandma pointed out a mark/blemish on Mom’s forehead, but Mom dismissed the comment, stating it was probably due to stress and lack of sleep.

“Patient’s mother had been crying. Patient’s father tried to console patient and patient’s mother, but she continued to cry inconsolably.” This strikes me as downright Soviet; who wouldn’t cry?

“I’m sure if we’d gone in there stone-faced, they’d have used that against us, too,” Boxx said. “I’ll be in therapy for a long time.”

Once his wife left the hospital room for court, she wasn't allowed back in Finn's room.

She'd only learned of the hearing from the nurse, after 5 p.m. on a Sunday, so the family really only had one day to find a lawyer before the Tuesday hearing that would decide what would happen to both her son and her daughter.



Melinda Henneberger

‘Hearing lasted 10 minutes’

Her older daughter’s father, Eddie Balderas, who lived in Texas at the time, two hours and 47 minutes from the San Antonio airport, said the DCF caseworker called

him on Monday night and said that if he wasn't in court in Olathe the next morning, then "she'll be remanded to the state."

He hit the road at 1:30 a.m., caught a 5 a.m. flight and by some miracle made it to court, where "the hearing lasted 10 minutes. They read the petition, and we all said something. I said she'd never had any problems, but if she couldn't stay at home I would suggest Grandma, or if not, I would love custody. The judge then immediately said boom, she's going to the state, into DCF custody." And that was it.

After the hearing, Balderas said, another official told him, "There was no way you were ever going to get custody today anyway, so there was no reason for me to even be there; who told you to come?" I picked her up from school and we went for a

burger, just to have a little fun, and no, DCF reached out yelling and came and took her.”

A month later, he said, he reached out to DCF to ask why Grandma Kim Goble, who’d previously seen both children every day, still couldn’t have them, because being in a different home every week was terrible, and “they said Grandma was still under investigation for lying.” But that was a Friday, and by Monday, he said, they were moved into Grandma’s one bedroom apartment.

These situations are Kafkaesque, and the conveyor belt moving kids around is so capricious that you really wonder if someone shouldn’t be investigating the investigators.

Obviously, these parents won’t get this first year of their child’s life back, and neither will Finn. If you are a parent, too, you know exactly what having your baby taken away from you during that first year of life would mean for your whole family.

10-year-old sister hurt the most

Goble says the person who has been hurt the most out of all of them is Finn’s now 10-year-old sister, Sawyer — yes, Mom is a Mark Twain fan.

When Sawyer told police that everything was fine at home, her family said, they decided that she was so convincing that she must have been coached, and on top of the upheaval of being apart from her family and moved all those times, that hurt her feelings.

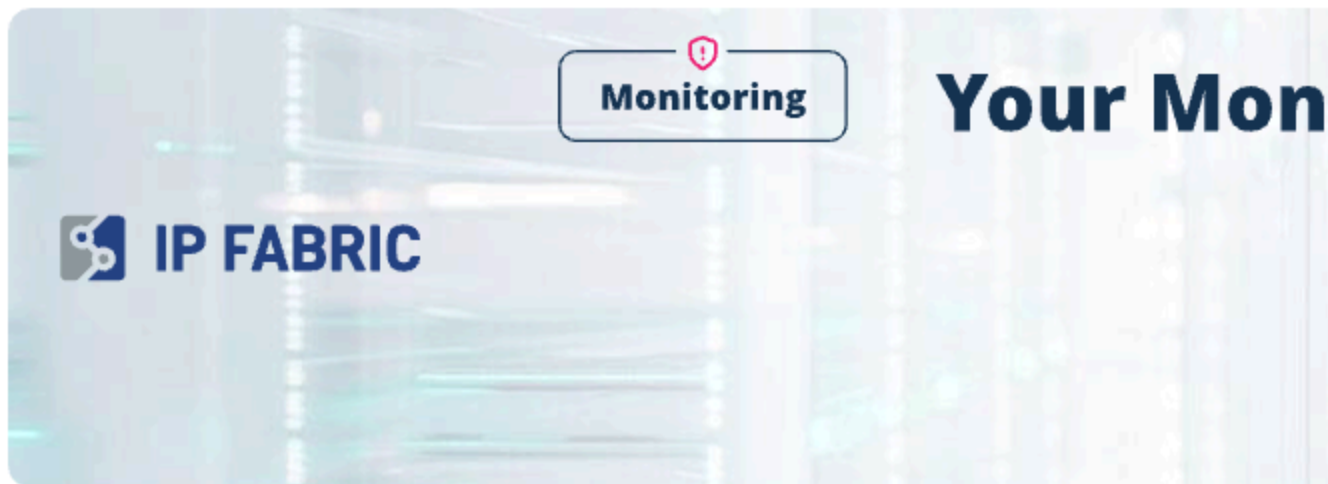
When I visited Goble and Boxx's home, there were still purple balloons arched over the doorway for Sawyer's Taylor Swift-themed birthday party. Sawyer was making a little handmade clay teacup, Poppy the rescue dog was chilling on the couch and Finn was cruising everywhere and expressing great interest in my pen. "He's just days away" from walking, his mom said. For all parents that milestone is thrilling, but it will come with some extra worries for this family.

In January, Goble said, DCF sent her a letter that said based on the original petition presented in court, the abuse allegations had been substantiated, but that Finn had been abused by an “unknown perpetrator.” Because, however, they still didn’t know how the injuries were caused, it said, allegations of “lack of supervision” had been substantiated against both parents. “And that’s what we’re still fighting now,” Goble said. “They give no example of this lack of supervision. We took our son to the doctor at the first sign of something being wrong.”

Goble said that the final DCF report said that the investigation had found that Finn had “sustained multiple serious injuries, some of which made it to where he was unable to feed properly and needing hospitalization for multiple days.” Again, as Kirkwood said, that’s language straight out of the original petition. And it’s at odds with what hospital records show.

‘I Googled and it said leukemia’

At a hearing last month, Finn’s parents were put on an informal supervision plan, which means that if there are no further issues, the family court abuse case will go away. Though Finn and Sawyer have been back in her physical custody since April, they will technically remain under state control until September 29. “And we are lucky,” Goble told me, “which is insane to say.”



No, it isn't. [Shawn Crawl](#) is serving a [seven-year prison sentence](#) in Farmington, Missouri, for causing multiple fractures in his infant son, who as it turns out has brittle bone disease.

[Robert Roberson](#), a man with autism whose lack of affect was originally held against him, is on death row in Texas in a “shaken baby” case. This despite the fact that those advocating for his innocence in the death of his 2-year-old daughter Nikki, who died of pneumonia, include the original police investigator of the case.

Powerful Republican and Democratic lawmakers in Roberson's state have pushed hard, and quite creatively, on his behalf. Yet will the facts be enough to save him? Last month, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton filed for a new execution date, and

on Wednesday, a court [set Oct. 16 as the date he will die](#). “We are not stopping,” his attorney Gretchen Sween told me after the hearing.

Among other relatively “lucky” parents are some of the members of the local support group of parents accused by the abuse specialists at Mercy I have spoken to over the last couple of years. One has had cameras installed all over her home, so that she can prove any future accidents are just that.

Another decided not to have the third child that she and her husband had always planned to have, because temporarily losing custody of their first two was so devastating. This mom, to whom I’ve spoken several times, does not want her name published because she’s still afraid of retribution from the state. She took her baby to Mercy in 2021, she told me, because she had a bruise on her stomach.

“I Googled it and it said leukemia. My mom said maybe just call the pediatrician, but I said no, it says leukemia, we have to go!” Even now, four years later, “any time we have to go to the pediatrician, I get a pit in my stomach,” she said, and cried for a minute.

When these parents did get their children back, no one ever said sorry, or gave them their reputations back. No one handed them a certificate they could show around that says they didn't do anything wrong, or that there were other medical reasons for what specialists saw as abuse. No one relieved them of the toll that takes on a marriage, or the dread that if their child falls out of a tree and breaks a bone, it will happen all over again

Most people in Sarah Goble's situation remain too afraid to speak out years later.

But Goble, who wore an "Innocence Is Enough" T-shirt to her recent administrative hearing in Johnson County family court, is not most people. She did not just agree that I write about her family; she insisted on it.



Amanda and Michael Liebig pose with their children Keira, 1, and Emelia, 3. Dominick Williams
dowilliams@kcstar.com

Reported for abuse before tests cleared her

So did Amanda Liebig, the organizer of the local support group. She is a Blue Springs mom and special education teacher who was hotlined by Mercy in May of 2022. This before the tests on her then 3-month-old baby Emilia, who was taken in for a burst blood vessel in her eye, had even come back. Emilia had just had COVID-19 and

reflux, and had been coughing and vomiting. But the SCAN clinic initially said that couldn't have been why she had retinal bleeding.



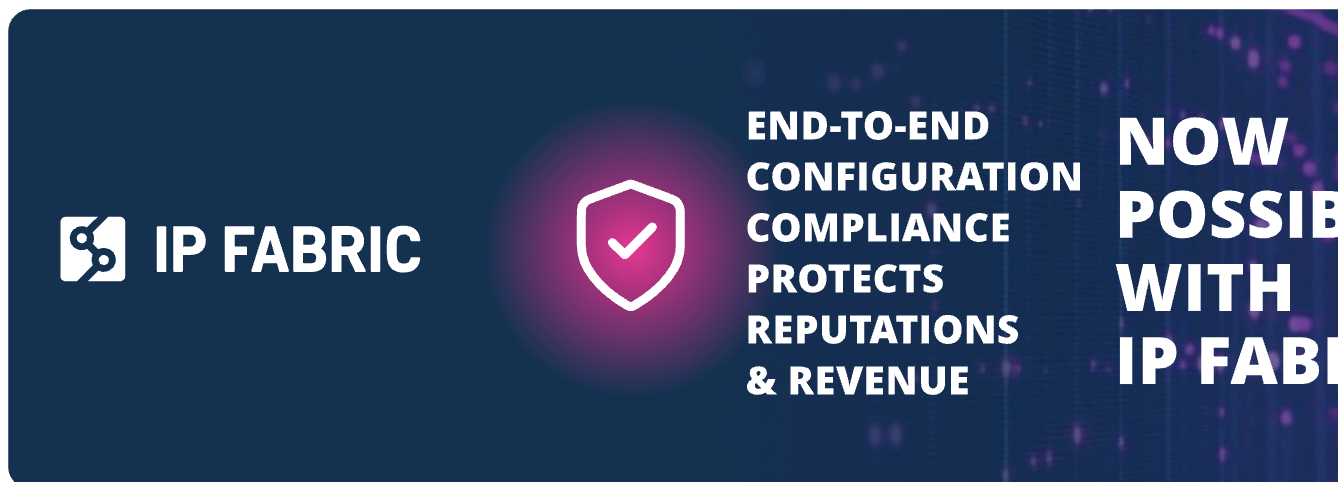
The tests cleared Emilia's parents of abuse. But before that happened, a social worker at Mercy told Liebig that as mandatory reporters themselves, since Amanda is a teacher and her husband Michael is a firefighter and paramedic, they would probably lose their jobs even if the complaint were unsubstantiated.

They didn't lose their daughter or their jobs, but the report did trigger months of oversight by the state, and anxieties that continue even now. Just last week, Liebig said, her now 3-year-old Emilia and 14-month-old Keira were jumping around, bumped heads and both wound up with bruises, "so I was scared all week I was

going to get hotlined. I've lost all faith in doctors, and know a lot of families who avoid taking their kids" for medical care.

She does know a lot of families, because the group she started now has about 100 members who are in regular touch. Her own mother, Krista Caton, a longtime neonatal intensive care unit nurse at Mercy and foster mom to 17 children over the years, said Mercy had been amazing in getting her foster son with medically complex needs where he is today, just as they had also helped Caton's parents with the care of some of their 32 foster children. "I've been their biggest champion and advocate for 30 years," Caton said, "and in one night it was all ruined. We're four generations affected by this."

Ever since this happened to Liebig's family, she has been trying to get some Missouri lawmaker interested in addressing the fact that "there's no recourse" for wrongly accused parents. She believes that she finally has found that brave soul, who is in a position to help, and did text me back. But then, neither the lawmaker helping her nor the one in Topeka helping Goble returned my calls, so I hope these leaders summon the courage to follow through.



“We’re not wanting to shut down the SCAN Clinic,” Liebig said. “We just want some accountability. If Mercy is doing their job correctly, then this is not an issue.”

Missouri does have a [Child Abuse and Neglect Review Board](#), which can review placement on the Child Abuse Registry, but does not intervene in reporting, removals or convictions.



Carrody Buchhorn served time behind bars in the 2016 death of Ollie Ortiz, a boy experts have since said died of a congenital heart defect.. The Star *MELINDA HENNEBERGER*

2 exoneration hearings in Kansas

Terra Frazier, the senior child abuse pediatrician who signed off on Finn's case, was an expert for the state in two Kansas child abuse/murder cases that I have written about many times. Both children, as it turned out, died of natural causes.

One of these involved [former Eudora day care worker Carrody Buchhorn](#), who served 3 1/2 years behind bars and another 2 1/2 on house arrest in the 2016 death of Ollie Ortiz, a boy experts have since said died of a congenital heart defect.

Frazier was the key witness against Chris Lyman, the former Army sergeant and Bronze Star recipient who [spent nearly 10 years behind bars for killing his nephew](#), Johnathan Swan, who had been in and out of hospitals all of his eight months of life and was later found to have died of chronic pneumonia.

Now Frazier has been named as a witness for the state in the upcoming civil exoneration hearings of Buchhorn in October and Lyman in December.

She never reviewed little Johnathan Swan's medical records. We know that because she didn't even have those records. No one asked for them until much later.

But if Ridge's Law and the new Georgia state protocols had been in effect in Kansas at that time, she would have to have reviewed those records.

She would have to have seen that little Johnathan had been ill his entire life, and on a ventilator at one point. She might even have learned that while the child's mom — Chris' wife's sister back in Ohio — was trying to get her life together, Johnathan was only in Kansas, where Chris had just been posted at Fort Riley, because everyone else the family knew was too afraid to take in such a sick child. Chris was Johnathan's person. As his weeping mother testified at Lyman's murder trial, Johnathan called him "Dada," and that was the only word he ever learned.

If Terra Frazier had seen those records, I don't see how Chris Lyman would ever have been convicted. Which would have spared him and his family [wounds that may never heal](#). But wouldn't it have been better for Frazier and her employers at Mercy, too? I'm going to say yes.

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**Melinda Henneberger**Opinion Contributor, *The Kansas City Star*  

Melinda Henneberger is The Star's metro columnist and a member of its editorial board. She won the Pulitzer Prize for commentary in 2022 and was a Pulitzer finalist for commentary in 2021, for editorial writing in 2020 and for commentary in 2019.

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ALL COMMENTS 1

NEWEST 

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User 62557f5 JUST NOW

Beautifully written <3

REPLY  0

US

User179894A 2 HRS AGO

Few people will read an article this long - why not condense into a more reasonable length for their busy day.

REPLY 1 REPLY  2

US

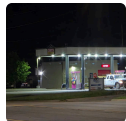
User1969752 1 HR AGOReply to **User179894A**

Excellent comment. Few people will read an article that is 10 times the normal column length. This is an important topic, but Henneberger should have cut it at least in half. She should have focused on what reforms could be introduced into child-protection services to achieve the hard balance between parents' rights and protecting children.

REPLY  1

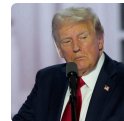
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