

## VERDICTS & SETTLEMENTS

# Father settles for \$14M in wrongful death suit against former state foster care contractor

■ ALAN SCHER ZAGIER

The father of a 3-year-girl killed by her mother's boyfriend while in legal custody of the state has reached a \$14 million wrongful death settlement in Jefferson County with Great Circle, a former state foster care case management contractor.

Before its 2023 merger with KVC Missouri, a Kansas City-based juvenile psychiatric health provider, the troubled St. Louis County nonprofit was the subject of an FBI raid, abuse charges against multiple employees (including its CEO) and the closure of its residential treatment program in Webster Groves.

The 2019 suit involved the March 2016 death of Aubrey Harvey, 3, at her Barnhart home while in the care of William Allen Harris, who admitted to being high on heroin and then beating and drowning the girl in the bathtub.

Harris is serving a 26-year prison sentence on a conviction of felony abuse or neglect of a child resulting in death.

The suit outlines how Great Circle's violations of the Missouri Child Welfare Manual resulted in Harris having close contact with Aubrey despite a November 2015 court order that prohibited Harris from having unsupervised contact with both Aubrey and her 1-year-old sister unless he had a clean drug screen and attended parenting classes.

While Harris did pass a drug test, he was not referred to parenting classes. Beyond that, it was alleged Great Circle's case worker failed to comply with a number of other Child Welfare Manual provisions that caused Harris to avoid any scrutiny.

Harris moved back in with the victim's mother on Dec. 28, 2015, said plaintiff's attorney Ryan Bradley. Further, a Great Circle foster care case manager also named in the suit did not advise the juvenile court judge at a Feb. 3, 2016, status hearing that Harris was again living in the household. She was murdered on March 7, 2019.

"After (she) authorized William Allen Harris to move back into the home without the approval of the family support team, over the course of several months, Aubrey was sexually abused, beaten, tortured and mistreated by suspected abuser Harris — the very individual Connelly and Great Circle were obligated to protect Aubrey from," the complaint alleged.

The complaint further alleged that after Aubrey's death, Great Circle administrators improperly went back and added notes to her case file in an attempt to downplay their culpability — a "cover-up" that Bradley said contributed to the eight-figure settlement agreement.

"It was absolutely a coverup," he said. "To go back in and modify her official records and put things in there as if they were timely was underhanded."

Defense attorneys Stephen Strum and Philip Graham of Sandberg Phoenix in St. Louis declined comment on behalf of KVC Missouri.

In announcing the merger last year, KVC Missouri President Lindsey Stephenson cited Great Circle's "long history, broad community of supporters and passion for serving families." The expanded company offers services in



Ryan Bradley

20 locations across the state.

Bradley recently filed a related lawsuit on behalf of Aubrey's surviving sibling that names Great Circle, KVC Memorial and several former employees as defendants.

### **\$14 million settlement Wrongful death**

**Venue:** Jefferson County Circuit Court  
**Case Number/Date:** 19JE-CC00148/  
July 2, 2024

**Judge:** Circuit Judge John Borbonus  
**Caption:** *Kyle Harvey v. Great Circle*  
**Plaintiff's attorney:** Ryan Bradley;  
Bradley Law Personal Injury Lawyers,  
St. Louis

**Defendant's attorneys:** Stephen Strum (lead) and Philip Graham;  
Sandberg Phoenix, St. Louis

**Plaintiff's experts:** Mary Case, St.

Louis (forensic pathology); Rosalyn Bertram, Kansas City (foster care case management); Angela Pepper, Kansas City (foster care case management); Laura Maurer, St. Louis (foster care case management)

**Defendant's experts:** Melody Yancey, Columbia (foster care case management); Christy Howard, Odessa (foster care case management)

**Insurance:** Philadelphia Indemnity Insurance Company (for Great Circle)

**Last pretrial offer:** \$300,000

**Last pretrial demand:** \$14 million.