



BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY



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PRESS RELEASE

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OROVILLE MOTHER SENTENCED TO PRISON AFTER INFANT'S DEATH

An Oroville woman was sentenced to four years in state prison yesterday for her conduct connected to the sudden death of her infant child.

Helen Warnick, 38, was sentenced in Butte County Superior Court yesterday by Judge Kristen Lucena following Warnick's earlier no-contest plea to one count of felony child abuse.

Warnick called emergency responders on April 18, 2022, when she discovered her two-month-old baby boy was unresponsive. First responders arrived at Warnick's house and unsuccessfully attempted to revive the baby. Warnick told investigators she had decided to take a nap in her bed at about 9:00 a.m. with the baby cradled in her arm. Warnick said that when she awoke about 2:00 p.m., the baby was lying face down on his stomach, unresponsive.

Further investigation revealed the baby had methamphetamine in his system. Warnick admitted she recently used methamphetamine and toxicology results confirmed that she also had methamphetamine in her system.

Autopsy results labeled the infant's death as an "unexplained sudden death" but noted the unsafe sleep environment (prone on an adult bed) "may have caused asphyxia by obstructing the nose and/or mouth" and the presence of methamphetamine in the child was of "unclear significance for cause of death that may have an increased risk for sudden death."

Warnick was also sentenced yesterday to a concurrent one-year prison sentence for a subsequent separate charge of identity theft stemming from a March 2023 theft and use of another person's credit card.

In court today, Warnick's attorney asked for a grant of probation. The District Attorney's Office objected and requested a term in state prison, pointing to Warnick's inability to change her behavior since the 2022 infant death incident. Warnick admitted she used methamphetamine, heroin, and fentanyl as recently as June 2023. The prosecutor also argued Warnick had previously been on a grant of probation for felony child stealing and misdemeanor child abuse in 2018 and failed to demonstrate she could successfully complete a grant of probation.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey stated, "This case was an absolute tragedy. She previously had other children taken from her by authorities for drug problems. The defendant expressed what appeared to be genuine remorse at the time of this child's death and seemed to want to change her lifestyle. But she was unable to do that in a free society and proved she was still a danger to public safety. State prison was the appropriate punishment."

Ramsey noted in response to an inquiry from members of the community that it is not possible under the law for a judge to prohibit a person from continuing to procreate.



Helen Warnick