

NO. 24-0881

# IN THE SUPREME COURT OF TEXAS

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**In the Interest of K.N., K.L., K.L. and K.L., Children**

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*On Petition for Review from the 7<sup>th</sup> Court of Appeals, Amarillo,  
Texas Cause No. 07-24-00146-CV*

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## **PETITION FOR REVIEW**

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**PETITIONER REQUESTS ORAL ARGUMENT**

## IDENTITY OF PARTIES AND COUNSEL

### Parties

R.L.

Petitioner

Respondent

Real Party in Interest

C.N.  
("Mother")

Ad Litem

K.N., K.L., K.L., and K.L.  
("The Children")

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NO. 24-0881

# **IN THE SUPREME COURT TEXAS**

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**In the Interest of K.N., K.L., K.L., and K.L., Children**

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## **PETITION FOR REVIEW**

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TO THE HONORABLE JUSTICES OF THE COURT:

### **STATEMENT OF THE CASE**

On March 29, The Department filed a Petition for Temporary Order for Required Participation in Services (CR 13). On August 31, 2022, The Department filed its Original Petition for Protection of a Child, for Conservatorship, and for Termination (CR 81). The Department was appointed the temporary managing conservator of the children on September 27, 2022 (CR 150). A final jury trial in this matter was held December 11, 2023, through December 15, 2023, where R.L.'s parental rights were terminated based upon 161.001(b)(1)(D), 161.001(b)(1)(E), 161.001(b)(1)(N) and 161.001(b)(1)(O). (CR 619).

*Proceedings in the trial court.* The lawsuit was filed in the 223<sup>rd</sup> Judicial District Court, Gray County, Texas, Honorable Judge Phil N. Vanderpool presiding.

*The judgment of the trial court.* Judge Vanderpool signed an order of termination on April 9, 2024.

*Proceedings in the court of appeals.* Petitioner appealed the judgment to the 7<sup>th</sup> Court of Appeals. Petitioner was the Appellant and Texas Department of Family and Protective Services was the Appellee. Mother was a Real Party in Interest.

*The opinion of the panel.* The panel that decided the case was composed of Justice Quinn, Justice Parker, and Justice Doss.

*The judgment of the court of appeals.* The court of appeals affirmed the judgment of the trial court on September 19, 2024.

### **STATEMENT OF JURISDICTION**

The Supreme Court has jurisdiction over this appeal because the court of appeals has committed an error of law of such importance to the state's jurisprudence that it should be corrected. *Tex. Gov't Code § 22.01(a)(6)*.

The natural right existing between parents and their children is of constitutional dimension. *See Santosky v. Kramer*, 455 U.S. 745, 758-59, 102 S.

Ct. 1388, 71 L.Ed. 2d 599 (1982). *See also Holick v. Smith*, 685 S.W.2d 18, 20 (Tex. 1985). Consequently, termination proceedings are strictly construed in favor of the parent. *In re E.R.*, 385 S.W.3d 552, 563 (Tex. 2012).

### **ISSUE PRESENTED**

- 1. ISSUE 1: The trial court did not have subject matter jurisdiction under the UCCJEA.**
- 2. ISSUE 2: Is the termination of parental rights under sections D and E justified based on the father's knowledge of mother's conduct, rather than neglect or abuse, and is placing other children under the sole managing conservatorship of the Department appropriate?**

### **STATEMENT OF FACTS**

The opinion of the court of appeals correctly states the nature of the case.

### **SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT**

When the initial custody proceeding commenced, the children were residing in Louisiana, not Texas. The statute governing the filing of emergency protection orders requires that such lawsuits be filed in the county where the children reside. Non-compliance with this statute resulted in the subsequent order being void. Additionally, the trial court's failure to adhere to the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act (UCCJEA) when asserting jurisdiction rendered the termination order and sole managing conservatorship void.

R.L. contends that his parental rights were not terminated due to any abuse or neglect (endangerment) under sections D and E, but rather due to his knowledge of C.N.'s harsh treatment of K.N. This followed a six-month standoff involving C.N. and the Department (R.L. was not named as a party). On August 22, 2022, the family moved to Louisiana. It was not until then that the Department sought termination and removal, with no new allegations of abuse or neglect. As a matter of law, the termination of R.L.'s rights to K.N., K.L., K.L., and K.L., and the sole managing conservatorship of younger siblings should be reversed.

### **ARGUMENT**

This case stands out among the hundreds of parental rights termination petitions filed each year, as referenced in Justice Busby's dissent in *In re R.R.A.*, 687 S.W.3d 269, 281-85 (Tex. 2024). It merits the Court's review for compelling reasons. Firstly, the trial court lacked subject matter jurisdiction. Secondly, the central issue is whether termination of parental rights is warranted not due to allegations of neglect or abuse, but rather because the parent did not cooperate with the Department to confirm the absence of such issues under grounds D and E. This distinction raises critical questions about the conditions under which parental rights may be terminated.

### **A. ISSUE 1: The Trial Court Lacked Subject Matter Jurisdiction Under the UCCJEA**

For the first time in his Petition for Review, R.L., raises the issue of subject matter jurisdiction. Subject matter jurisdiction cannot be waived and can be raised for the first time on appeal or in a petition for review. *Carroll v. Carroll*, 304 S.W.3d 366, 367 (Tex. 2010).

The central issue is whether a trial court can assert home state jurisdiction when the children, residing in another state at the start of legal proceedings, are later forcibly brought back by law enforcement following an emergency order, four months after these proceedings began.

The case began when K.N. reported to her school that her mother, C.N., had been dragging her by the hair. Following this incident, the Department's investigator reached out to C.N., who refused to cooperate, prompting the Department to secure a motion and an order to participate in services on April 8, 2022. (CR 35; RR V 3, pg 26-27). The order issued on that date was not classified as a custody determination under Texas Family Code Section 264.203(e), which does not constitute a “child custody determination” or “child custody proceeding”

nor an “initial determination” as defined in Texas Family Code Section 102.102.

Later, on August 20, 2022, R.L. and C.N., along with their children, relocated to Louisiana. Despite their move, the legal battle continued in Texas. On August 31, 2022, the Department filed an “Original Petition for Protection of a Child, for Conservatorship, and for Termination in Suit Affecting Parent-Child Relationship” (CR 81). That same day, a Texas court issued an “Order for Protection in an Emergency” (CR 113). It was during this phase that R.L. was officially recognized as a party, specifically cited as the alleged father of the three younger children. The jurisdiction for these actions was claimed under Texas Family Code Section 262.002, allowing the suit to be filed in the county where the children could be located. (RR V 4, pg 193).

Subsequent to this, an adversary hearing took place on September 21, 2022. At this hearing, C.N., declared her refusal to surrender the children to the Department (RR V 4, pg 181-182), confirming that the family was residing in Louisiana. The jurisdictional conflict escalated further when C.N. was indicted on October 10, 2022, for interference with a child custody order (RR V 7, Pet. Ex 14). In November of the same year, C.N. was arrested in Louisiana, which led to the children being forcibly transported back to Texas. (RR V 4, pg 144; RR V 7, Pet.

Ex. 1), the family was living in Louisiana at that time. The culmination of these legal proceedings saw R.L.'s parental rights to his stepdaughter and biological children being terminated following a jury trial. The children were placed under the sole conservatorship of the Department. The final judicial order identified Texas as the home state of the children, which established the legal basis for the court's jurisdiction.

In the legal analysis of the custody dispute involving R.L., as defined by the UCCJEA, the "Original Petition for Protection. . ." was the commencement of the proceeding from which jurisdiction is measured. *See* Texas Family Code Section 152.201. The statutory criteria for filing the emergency order in the county "where the child may be found" was not satisfied, because the children were located in Louisiana, rather than Gray County, Texas, at the time of filing. This incorrect venue highlights a significant procedural error in the case.

In Texas, the UCCJEA is the exclusive basis for making a child custody determination by a court of this state, Texas Family Code Section 152.201(b). The initial custody determination was made pursuant to an emergency order of protection. The UCCJEA provides for emergency jurisdiction if the child is present in the state, Texas Family Code 152.204. Here, the children were not present in the state of Texas at the time of the initial custody determination so this

statute cannot provide a basis for jurisdiction. Even if the court was exercising emergency jurisdiction, this cannot provide a basis for the rendering of a final custody determination. *Garza v. Harney*, 726 S.W.2d 198 (Tex.App.–Amarillo 1987, no writ). This is what happened in the present case. The court entered an emergency order for protection and used the order to forcibly remove the children from Louisiana to bring them back to Texas four months later. Once the children were forcibly placed in Texas, the Department could claim home state jurisdiction in the final orders. The Department may not use emergency jurisdiction to bootstrap to home state jurisdiction according to caselaw, and, so, the basis for jurisdiction results in subsequent orders as void.

According to the UCCJEA, a child's "home state" is where they lived with a parent for at least six consecutive months immediately before the start of custody proceedings, implying physical presence. However, when the Department initiated its Original Petition on August 31, 2022, the children and both parents had already been residing in Louisiana since August 20, 2022. Consequently, Texas was not the home state at the commencement of the proceeding, negating the basis for claiming home state jurisdiction. Furthermore, as neither parent remained in Texas, the conditions under Texas Family Code § 152.201(a)(1) that could allow home state jurisdiction were not met.

The emergency jurisdiction claimed under Texas Family Code § 152.204 is intended for situations where the child is present in the state and in imminent danger. This jurisdiction was misapplied since the children were not in Texas when the emergency order was issued. Such jurisdiction is temporary and cannot establish a basis for permanent custody decisions, as seen in the case *Garza v. Harney*, 726 S.W.2d 198. This case exemplifies the problematic practice of "bootstrapping" jurisdiction, where emergency measures are improperly used to create the basis for ongoing jurisdiction that was originally lacking. This practice contravenes the principles of the UCCJEA, which aims to ensure that custody cases are resolved in the child's home state or another suitable venue, fostering stability and fairness, thereby preventing forum shopping and manipulation of jurisdiction.

Was there any other basis to claim jurisdiction under the UCCJEA?

Home State Jurisdiction—Under the UCCJEA, a state has jurisdiction if that state was one in which a child lived with a parent for at least six consecutive months immediately before the commencement of a child custody proceeding or was the home state of the child within six months before the commencement of the proceeding and the child is absent from the state, but a parent continues to live in that state. *See* TEX. FAM.CODE ANN. §§ 152.102(7), 152.201(a)(1). The

word “lived” connotes physical presence. *Powell v. Stover*, 165 S.W.3d 322, 326 (Tex.2005). In *Powell*, this Honorable Court explained that the Legislature used the word “lived” to avoid “complicating the determination of a child's home state with inquiries into the states of mind of the child or the child's adult caretakers.” *Id.* (citing *Escobar v. Reisinger*, 133 N.M. 487, 64 P.3d 514, 517 (2003)). The UCCJEA suggests that the child's physical location is the central factor to be considered when determining the child's home state. *Id.*

At the time of the initial custody determination the children and both parents were living in Louisiana. Therefore, Texas Family Code 152.201(1) cannot provide a basis for jurisdiction because: 1. The children’s physical location was Louisiana at the time the action commenced. That is where they were living. 2. Both parents have also left Texas, so the provision of the statute which allows the court to exercise jurisdiction within six months even if the child is not present in the state, but a parent remains in the state is not applicable.

As for the second basis of jurisdiction under the statute (Texas Family Code Section 152.201(2)), there were no findings to support jurisdiction based on this subsection. There were no findings indicating that another state would lack jurisdiction under section one of the statute, no determination that Texas is a more appropriate forum, no findings of significant connections of any parties to Texas,

no findings of substantial evidence available in this state, and no indication that no other court would have jurisdiction. C.N. claims that the mere assertion in the final orders of termination and conservatorship that Texas was the home state of the children does not meet the requirements of the UCCJEA to establish subject matter jurisdiction under these circumstances.

Given the constitutional nature of the rights involved in the parent child relationship, strict compliance with the statutes should be required. That did not happen in this case and the orders should be declared void.

R.L. acknowledges Justice Lehrmann's concurring opinion in *In re D.S.*, 602 S.W.3d 504 (Tex 2020), which states that the UCCJEA does not affect subject matter jurisdiction. However, as Justice Lehrmann notes, the primary concern of the UCCJEA is determining the proper venue for litigation. Failure to adhere to its provisions can lead to an error that renders a judgment voidable in a direct attack, but not in a collateral one. This case involves a direct attack. The orders should be declared void for failure to adhere to the requirement to obtain jurisdiction and the children returned to the parents.

- A. ISSUE 2: Is the termination of parental rights under sections D and E justified based on the father's knowledge, rather than neglect or abuse, and is placing other children under the sole managing conservatorship of the Department appropriate?**

R.L., asserts the termination of rights as to four children was solely because of his knowledge of C.N.'s treatment of K.N. and his refusal to cooperate with the Department as opposed to any significant abuse or neglect. The Court of Appeals gave little attention to this issue and listed the abuse allegations found in the record and found them sufficient to support the termination K.N. (not his biological or adopted child) and the other three children; witnessing this abuse was sufficient to support a finding that R.L., was a danger to these children as well. The Court of Appeals did admit that they saw it as "mother's discipline crossed the line. . ." and . . . "[t]hough Father was not directly involved in the abuse of KN, he was present when it occurred and knew of it." The Court of Appeals only addressed D and E grounds in its opinion. It did not address O (failure to work services) or N (abandonment).

A closer review of the record reveals R.L. lost his children because of his defiance of the Department's requirements, not because of abuse.

The case started in March 2022 (Record of Review, Volume 7, Exhibit 3). K.N. informed the school that her mother pulls her around by her hair and has instructed her not to discuss household matters (RR V 3, pg 21). The investigator met with K.N. at school, where initially she was hesitant but eventually spoke to

the investigator (RR V 3, pg 22). K.N. disclosed that her mother had pulled her hair, although she stated it did not cause her pain. Her mother disciplines her by yelling, making her sit against the wall, and writing sentences. (RR V 3, pg 22).

The investigator goes to the house with the intention of meeting with C.N. During the contact R.L. speaks with the investigator outside and allows the investigator to see the children but denies her entry to the home or permission to interview the children. (RR V 3, pg 25). A second report came from a teacher who received a note from K.N. stating that her mother was dragging her by the hair. (RR V 3, pg 25). This time, K.N. refused to speak because she had been punished the last time she did so. (RR V 3, pg 26). The investigator went to the house and the parents refused to cooperate (RR V 3, pg 26). At this stage, the children have not been removed; however, the Department is seeking an order for participation in services. (R.L. is not named by the Department as a party) (RR V 3, pg 27) The Department did not even require their usual full complement of required services. Instead, they only requested C.N. complete individual counseling, anger management and a psychological study.

The investigator admits C.N. has a right not to talk to her (RR V 3, pg 29 - 30). There were no marks or bruises on the children, no child was in immediate danger (RR V 3, pg 30). The children remained at home (RR V 3, pg 31). There

was only one incident of K.N.'s hair being pulled (RR V 3, pg 55).

The case worker is called to testify (RR V 3, pg 60). He made numerous attempts to contact C.N. and they were unsuccessful (RR V 3, pg 63-67). He admits that he has no idea whether the children are safe or not (RR V 3: 77-78). He never had any contact with C.N. from April 2022 through September 2022 (RR V 3, pg 75). There still had been no removal of the children. In August 2022, C.N. and R.L. and family move to Louisiana (RR V 3, pg 165).

As noted in the aforementioned point of error, following the relocation to Louisiana, the Department filed for emergency protection. Writs of attachment were issued, the mother was indicted, and following her arrest, the children were returned to Texas in November 2022.

The caseworker who assumed the case after the children were removed testified that R.L. and C.N. had been in contact with him but declined to participate in the services mandated by the Department. (RR V 3, pg 157- 175). The worker admitted that he was confused as to why this was even a case (RR V 3, pg 181:6-7). The worker admitted that if C.N. had worked services, it would have been unusual for the kids to NOT be returned to C.N. (RR V 3, pg 174-188). K.N. told the caseworker in November 2022 that she felt safe with her parents (RR V 3, pg 195). K.N. told the worker that she did not think her mother was harsh in her

treatment of her and she missed her parents, at least at the beginning of the case (RR V 3, pg 196).

The Department's own actions demonstrate that termination of parental rights for R.L., as to all the children, and the Department receiving sole conservatorship of the children, was because of his refusal to cooperate with the Department, not because of endangering conduct or environment. The Department left the children in R.L.'s and C.N.'s care for almost six months after the outcry, indicating no danger to the children. The investigator admits there was no immediate danger, no marks or bruising. The subsequent caseworker admits he has no idea whether the children are safe or not. The affidavits that support the motion to participate in services are identical to the ones filed to support the emergency removal, the only difference being a recitation of the attempts over the last six months to get C.N. to participate and her continued refusal to do so, no additional allegations of abuse or neglect (R.L. is not named as a party) (CR 96, 111). Nothing had changed from the time of the initial outcry, when the Department determined removal was not warranted, until the time of the filing of the emergency removal other than mother refusing to cooperate. The attorney for the Department stated in his opening statement that the case was one of "principle" with C.N. telling the Department they had no right to tell her how to raise her

children and her defiance of court orders.... nothing about abuse or neglect.

The situation becomes even more egregious when we consider K.N.'s younger siblings, who were removed from R.L. His rights were terminated, and they were placed in the sole managing conservatorship of the Department, even though the jury did not terminate C.N.'s parental rights. The Family Code establishes a rebuttable presumption that a parent will be named a child's managing conservator, unless the court finds that such an appointment would not be in the child's best interest because it would significantly impair the child's physical health or emotional development, or if there is a history of family violence involving the parents. *See* § 153.13, *In re J.A.J.*, 243 S.W.3d 611, 614 (Tex. 2007).

The outcry witness testified that K.N. never disclosed any alleged abuse by R.L. to her or her siblings. (RR V 3, pg 197: 11-21). The investigator on the 2022 report stated that at the time she had no concerns about the younger children, only K.N. (RR V 3, pg 32) and R.L., was not identified in the petition as a party of concern (RR V 3, pg 33). The investigator testified K.N. did not make any statements to lead her to believe R.L. was an unfit parent (CR V 3, pg 34: 17-19). Maternal grandmother testified that she had no real concerns about the younger children (RR V 3, pg 27). The affidavits to support the motions to order participation in services and the motion for emergency removal of the children

make no mention of the younger children. In fact, part of The Department's concerns was that K.N. is treated differently than her siblings (CR 110). The two youngest children are 3 and 5 (RR V 4, pg 70). The oldest, K.L., is 8. She has been adamant that she wanted to return to R.L. and C.N. She was always very consistent about wanting to return to her parents (RR V 4, pg 94). Placement, maternal grandmother, reports they missed their parents and even cried on occasion when they went to bed because they missed their parents (RR V 4, pg 43).

Again, there was no evidence that R.L., would significantly impair the child's physical health or emotional development. The Department and the Honorable Court of Appeals relied on the allegation that because the children witnessed the alleged abuse of their sister, there was sufficient evidence to support removal of them from R.L.'s care. This basis fails if there was no abuse of K.N in the first place.

This Court has said traditional forms of discipline, even though they may have fallen into disfavor in some parts of society, should have no place in serving as a basis for termination, "if reliance on these old fashioned punishments-and others like them, such as spanking-can be used against parents by a government that seeks to take away their parental rights, then " the fundamental right of parents to make decisions concerning the care, custody, and control of their children" is no

longer what it once was. *In re A.M.*, 630 S.W.3d 25, 27 (Tex 2019). In the present case we had a tug of the ponytail (which the victim downplayed and said didn't hurt) and time outs wherein the child was required to sit or stand against a wall. Both traditional forms of discipline. K.N. herself stated she did not consider her treatment harsh.

Recently, this Court addressed the *Boyd* standard for endangerment and affirmed that actual harm need not occur to support termination under D and E. *In re R.R.A.*, 687 S.W. 3d 269 (Tex 2024). However, the dissents by Justice Blacklock and Busby point out the “death penalty” of family law cases should not be used in marginal cases.

In any non-ideal family situation—whether poverty, homelessness, drugs, living in a rough neighborhood, etc.—the children will face many dangers not faced by children in more ideal environments. This does not make their parents eligible for the civil death penalty under the Family Code. *See In re D.T.*, 625 S.W.3d 62, 69 (Tex. 2021) (describing parental termination as the “death penalty” of civil cases). Properly understood, the statute requires clear and convincing evidence of endangerment *that warrants the extraordinary remedy of termination*. This surely means, at a minimum, that the children have actually suffered significant harm or have blessedly avoided significant harm despite being exposed to extraordinarily dangerous conditions by their parents. *In re R.R.A.*, 687 S.W.3d 269, 284 (Tex. 2024).

In the present case, the use of traditional methods of discipline, the recanting of any harm by K.N., the complete absence of any harm to the younger siblings, and the admission by the Department that it shouldn't even have been a case, make this a marginal case for which termination, or the removal of the younger siblings, should not have been available to the government. Father tested positive for amphetamine but showed the caseworker a photograph of his prescription bottle of Adderall. (RR 3, pg 173:10-21, RR 3, pg 193: 18-24). R.L. refused to allow the Department access to his medical records. The caseworker testified he did not submit photographic proof of the prescription bottle to the Medical Review Officer, RR 3, pg 215: 5-20). He was found at fault merely for informing the Department that he did not wish to engage in counseling, anger management, a psychological evaluation, or disclose his medical records, which ultimately led to the destruction of his family. At some point, this Court is going to have to provide guidance as to how to balance a parent's constitutional right to raise their children with the States interest in protecting children. The petitioner argues this case offers the opportunity to do so. It is a government overreach to destroy this family under these circumstances.

## **CONCLUSION AND PRAYER**

For the reasons stated in this petition, the Petitioner asks the Supreme Court to grant this petition for review, request briefs from the parties, set this case for oral argument and after argument, reverse the judgment of the appellate and trial court and either render judgment returning the children to R.L., or remand this case for a trial on the merits.

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By: /s/ Jay A. Michelsen  
Jay A. Michelsen

**CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE**

In accordance with Texas Rules of Appellate Procedure 9.4 (e) and (i), the undersigned attorney of record certifies that the Brief of Appellee contains **14-point** typeface for the body of the brief, **12-point** typeface for footnotes in the brief, and contains **3928** words, excluding those words identified as not being counted in appellate rule of procedure 9.4(i)(1), and was prepared on Microsoft Word for Office 365®.

*//s/ Jay A. Michelsen*  
Jay A. Michelsen  
Attorney for Petitioner

**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

I certify that a true copy of the above was served on each attorney of record or party in accordance with the Texas Rules of Civil Procedure on November 4, 2024, as follows:

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Attorney for Petitioner

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**NOTICE: THIS DOCUMENT  
CONTAINS SENSITIVE DATA**

**CAUSE NO. 40,562**

**IN THE INTEREST OF**

**K. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED]  
K. [REDACTED] L. [REDACTED]  
K. [REDACTED] L. [REDACTED] E.  
K. [REDACTED] L. [REDACTED]**

**CHILDREN**

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**IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF**

**GRAY COUNTY, TEXAS**

**223RD JUDICIAL DISTRICT**

**ORDER OF TERMINATION**

On December 11, 2023 through December 15, 2023, the Court heard and rendered this case.

**1. Appearances**

- 1.1. The Department of Family and Protective Services (“the Department”) appeared through **HEIDI COMBS**, permanency specialist from St. Francis Ministries, and by attorney, **TODD L. ALVEY**. St. Francis Ministries has assumed the Department’s statutory duties for providing foster care services in this county and hearing pursuant to Texas Family Code Chapter 264, Subchapter B-1.
- 1.2. Respondent Mother **C. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED]** appeared in person and through attorney of record **NATALIE ARCHER** and announced ready.
- 1.3. Respondent Presumed Father **R. [REDACTED] L. [REDACTED]** appeared in person and through attorney of record **JOEL B. JACKSON** and announced ready.
- 1.4. Not appearing was an **UNKNOWN MAN**, against whom an interlocutory decree of termination as to the child Kaisley Niccum, was rendered by this Court. That interlocutory decree of termination is a final judgment for appellate purposes upon signing of this order.
- 1.5. **TAYLOR HARRIS**, appointed by the Court as Attorney Ad Litem for the children the subject of this suit, appeared and announced ready.
- 1.6. **CASA OF THE HIGH PLAINS, INC.**, appointed by the Court as Guardian Ad Litem for the children the subject of this suit, appeared and announced ready.

**2. Jurisdiction and Service of Process**

- 2.1. The Court, having examined the record and heard the evidence and argument of counsel, finds the following:
  - 2.1.1. a request for identification of a court of continuing, exclusive jurisdiction has been made as required by Section 155.101, Texas Family Code.

2.1.2. this Court has jurisdiction of this case and of all the parties and that no other court has continuing, exclusive jurisdiction of this case.

2.2. The Court, having examined the record and heard the evidence and argument of counsel, finds that the State of Texas has jurisdiction to render final orders regarding the children the subject of this suit pursuant to Subchapter C, Chapter 152, Texas Family Code, by virtue of the fact that Texas is the home state of the children.

2.3. The Court finds that all persons entitled to citation were properly cited.

### 3. Jury

A jury was duly selected. The Court submitted this case to the jury on questions, and the jury returned its findings on those questions. The jury's findings were received by the Court and filed of record. The questions submitted to the jury and the findings on those questions are approved by the Court and incorporated in this order.

### 4. Record

The record of testimony was duly reported by the court reporter for the 223rd Judicial District Court of Gray County.

### 5. The Children

The Court finds that the following children are the subject of this suit:

5.1. Name: K [REDACTED] N [REDACTED]  
Sex: [REDACTED]  
Birth Date: [REDACTED]  
Present Residence: Relative's Home

5.2. Name: K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED]  
Sex: [REDACTED]  
Birth Date: [REDACTED]  
Present Residence: Relative's Home

5.3. Name: K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED]  
Sex: female  
Birth Date: [REDACTED]  
Present Residence: Relative's Home

5.4. Name: K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED]  
Sex: Male  
Birth Date: [REDACTED]  
Present Residence: Relative's Home

### 6. Reasonable Efforts to Return the Children

6.1. The Court finds by clear and convincing evidence that the Department made reasonable efforts to return the children to the parents. However, despite those reasonable efforts to return the children home to the parents, a continuing danger remains in the home that prevents return.

6.2. The Court specifically finds that those reasonable efforts include the following:

6.2.1. The Department created a family service plan that is narrowly tailored to address any specific issues identified.

6.2.2. The Department made a referral for services, provided services, or paid for services.

**7. Termination of Respondent Mother C. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED]'S Parental Rights**

7.1. The Court finds by clear and convincing evidence that termination of the parent-child relationship between C. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] and the child, K. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] the subject of this suit is in the child's best interest, pursuant to § 161.001(b)(2), Texas Family Code.

7.2. Further, the Court finds by clear and convincing evidence that C. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] has:

7.2.1. knowingly placed or knowingly allowed K. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] to remain in conditions [REDACTED] which endanger the physical or emotional well-being of K. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] pursuant to § 161.001(b)(1)(D), Texas Family Code;

7.2.2. engaged in conduct or knowingly placed K. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] with persons who [REDACTED] in [REDACTED] which endangers the physical or emotional well-being of K. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] pursuant to § 161.001(b)(1)(E), Texas Family Code;

7.2.3. constructively abandoned K. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] who has been in the permanent or temporary managing conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services for not less than [REDACTED] (1) the Department has made reasonable efforts to return K. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] to the mother; (2) the [REDACTED] has not regularly visited or maintained significant contact with K. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED]; (3) the mother has demonstrated an inability to provide K. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] with a safe environment, pursuant to § 161.001(b)(1)(N), Texas Family Code;

7.2.4. failed to comply with the provisions of a court order that specifically established the actions necessary for the mother to obtain the return of K. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] who has been in the permanent or temporary managing conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services for not less than nine months as a result of K. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] removal from the parent under Chapter 262 for the abuse or neglect of the child, pursuant to § 161.001(b)(1)(O), Texas Family Code.

7.3. **IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED** that the parent-child relationship between C. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] and K. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] the subject of this suit is terminated.

7.4. In accordance with § 161.001(b)(2) Texas Family Code, the Court finds that the order of termination of the parent-child relationship as to C. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED] is not based on evidence that C. [REDACTED] N. [REDACTED]:

7.4.1. homeschooled the child;

7.4.2. is economically disadvantaged;

7.4.3. has been charged with a nonviolent misdemeanor other than:

7.4.3.1. an offense under Title 5, Penal Code;

- 7.4.3.2. an offense under Title 6, Penal Code; or
  - 7.4.3.3. an offense that involves family violence, as defined by §71.004 of this code;
  - 7.4.4. provided or administered low-THC cannabis to a child for whom the low-THC cannabis was prescribed under Chapter 169, Occupations Code;
  - 7.4.5. declined immunization for the child for reasons of conscience, including a religious belief;
  - 7.4.6. sought an opinion from more than one medical provider relating to the child's medical care, transferred the child's medical care to a new medical provider, or transferred the child to a new health care facility; or
  - 7.4.7. allowed the child to engage in independent activities that are appropriate and typical for the child's level of maturity, physical condition, developmental abilities, or culture.
- 7.5. In accordance with §161.001(d), Texas Family Code, the Court finds that [REDACTED] N[REDACTED] did not prove by a preponderance of evidence that C[REDACTED] N[REDACTED] (1) was unable to comply with specific provisions of a court order; and (2) the parent made a good faith effort to comply with the order and the failure to comply with the order is not attributable to any fault of the parent.

**8. Termination of Respondent Father R[REDACTED] L[REDACTED]'s Parental Rights**

- 8.1. The Court finds by clear and convincing evidence that termination of parental rights of respondent R[REDACTED] L[REDACTED] and the children K[REDACTED] L[REDACTED], K[REDACTED] L[REDACTED], AND K[REDACTED] L[REDACTED], is in the children's best interest, pursuant to § 161.001(b)(2), Texas Family Code.
- 8.2. Further, the Court finds by clear and convincing evidence that R[REDACTED] L[REDACTED] has:
- 8.2.1. knowingly placed or knowingly allowed the children to remain in conditions or surroundings which endanger the physical or emotional well-being of the children, pursuant to § 161.001(b)(1)(D), Texas Family Code;
  - 8.2.2. engaged in conduct or knowingly placed the children with persons who engaged in conduct which endangers the physical or emotional well-being of the children, pursuant to § 161.001(b)(1)(E), Texas Family Code;
  - 8.2.3. constructively abandoned the children who have been in the permanent or temporary managing conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services for not less than six months and: (1) the Department has made reasonable efforts to return the children to the father; (2) the father has not regularly visited or maintained significant contact with the children; and (3) the father has demonstrated an inability to provide the children with a safe environment, pursuant to § 161.001(b)(1)(N), Texas Family Code;
  - 8.2.4. failed to comply with the provisions of a court order that specifically established the actions necessary for the father to obtain the return of the children who have been in the permanent or temporary managing

conservatorship of the Department of Family and Protective Services for not less than nine months as a result of the children's removal from the parent under Chapter 262 for the abuse or neglect of the children, pursuant to § 161.001(b)(1)(O), Texas Family Code;

- 8.3. **IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED** that the parent-child relationship between R [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] and the children K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED], K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED], AND K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] is terminated.
- 8.4. In accordance with §161.001(c), Texas Family Code, the Court finds that the order of termination of the parent-child relationship as to R [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] is not based on evidence that R [REDACTED] L [REDACTED]:
- 8.4.1. homeschooled the child;
  - 8.4.2. is economically disadvantaged;
  - 8.4.3. has been charged with a nonviolent misdemeanor other than:
    - 8.4.3.1. an offense under Title 5, Penal Code;
    - 8.4.3.2. an offense under Title 6, Penal Code; or
    - 8.4.3.3. an offense that involves family violence, as defined by §71.004 of this code;
  - 8.4.4. provided or administered low-THC cannabis to a child for whom the low-THC cannabis was prescribed under Chapter 169, Occupations Code;
  - 8.4.5. declined immunization for the child for reasons of conscience, including a religious belief;
  - 8.4.6. sought an opinion from more than one medical provider relating to the child's medical care, transferred the child's medical care to a new medical provider, or transferred the child to a new health care facility;
  - 8.4.7. allowed the child to engage in independent activities that are appropriate and typical for the child's level of maturity, physical condition, developmental abilities, or culture, or
- 8.5. In accordance with §161.001(d), Texas Family Code, the Court finds that R [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] did not prove by a preponderance of evidence that R [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] (1) was unable to comply with specific provisions of a court order; and (2) the parent made a good faith effort to comply with the order and the failure to comply with the order is not attributable to any fault of the parent.

**9. Interstate Compact**

The Court finds that Petitioner has filed a verified allegation or statement regarding compliance with the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children as required by § 162.002(b)(1) of the Texas Family Code.

**10. Managing Conservatorship: K [REDACTED] N [REDACTED]**

- 10.1. The Court finds that the appointment of the Respondents as permanent managing conservator of the children is not in the children's best interest because the appointment would significantly impair children's physical health or emotional development.

10.2. **IT IS ORDERED** that the **DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES** is appointed Permanent Managing Conservator of K [REDACTED] N [REDACTED], a child the subject of this suit, with the rights and duties specified in § 153.371, Texas Family Code; the Court finding this appointment to be in the best interest of the child.

10.2.1. In addition to these rights and duties, **IT IS ORDERED** that the Department is authorized to consent to the medical care for K [REDACTED] N [REDACTED] under § 266.004, Texas Family Code.

**11. Managing Conservatorship: K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED]**

11.1. The Court finds that the appointment of the Respondents as permanent managing conservator of the children is not in the children's best interest because the appointment would significantly impair children's physical health or emotional development.

11.2. **IT IS ORDERED** that the **DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES** is appointed Permanent Managing Conservator of K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED], a child the subject of this suit, with the rights and duties specified in § 153.371, Texas Family Code; the Court finding this appointment to be in the best interest of the child.

11.2.1. In addition to these rights and duties, **IT IS ORDERED** that the Department is authorized to consent to the medical care for K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] under § 266.004, Texas Family Code.

**12. Managing Conservatorship: K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED]**

12.1. The Court finds that the appointment of the Respondents as permanent managing conservator of the children is not in the children's best interest because the appointment would significantly impair children's physical health or emotional development.

12.2. **IT IS ORDERED** that the **DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES** is appointed Permanent Managing Conservator of K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED], a child the subject of this suit, with the rights and duties specified in § 153.371, Texas Family Code; the Court finding this appointment to be in the best interest of the child.

12.2.1. In addition to these rights and duties, **IT IS ORDERED** that the Department is authorized to consent to the medical care for K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] under § 266.004, Texas Family Code.

**13. Managing Conservatorship: K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED]**

13.1. The Court finds that the appointment of the Respondents as permanent managing conservator of the children is not in the children's best interest because the appointment would significantly impair children's physical health or emotional development.

13.2. **IT IS ORDERED** that the **DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES** is appointed Permanent Managing Conservator of K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED], a child the subject of this suit, with the rights and duties specified in §

153.371, Texas Family Code; the Court finding this appointment to be in the best interest of the child.

13.2.1. In addition to these rights and duties, **IT IS ORDERED** that the Department is authorized to consent to the medical care for K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] under § 266.004, Texas Family Code.

**14. Required Information Regarding the Parties and Children**

14.1. The children's information is provided above; the information required of each party not exempted from such disclosure is:

14.1.1. Name: C [REDACTED] N [REDACTED]  
Driver's License: Unknown  
Current address: [REDACTED]

14.1.2. Name: R [REDACTED] L [REDACTED]  
Driver's License: [REDACTED]  
Current address: [REDACTED]

14.2. **IT IS ORDERED** that each parent, who has not previously done so, provide information regarding the medical history of the parent and parent's ancestors on the medical history report form, pursuant to § 161.2021, Texas Family Code.

**15. Continuation of Court-Ordered Ad Litem or Advocate**

15.1. The Court finds that the children the subject of this suit will continue in care and this Court will continue to review the placement, progress and welfare of the children.

15.2. **IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED** that **TAYLOR HARRIS**, earlier appointed as Attorney and Guardian Ad Litem to represent the children, is continued in this relationship as long as the children remain in the Conservatorship of the Department.

15.3. **IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED** that **CASA OF THE HIGH PLAINS, INC.**, earlier appointed as Guardian Ad Litem to represent the children, is continued in this relationship as long as the children remain in the Conservatorship of the Department.

**16. Court Ordered Ad Litem for Parent**

16.1. **IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED** that **NATALIE ARCHER** earlier appointed to represent C [REDACTED] N [REDACTED] is continued in this relationship as long as the children remain in the Conservatorship of the Department.

16.2. **IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED** that **JOEL B. JACKSON** earlier appointed to represent R [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] is **DISMISSED** based on a finding of good cause.

**17. Dismissal of Other Court-Ordered Relationships**

Except as otherwise provided in this order, any other existing court-ordered relationships with the children the subject of this suit are hereby terminated and any parties claiming a court-ordered relationship with the children are dismissed from this suit.

**18. Post-Termination Child Support**

18.1. Pursuant to § 154.001 (a-1), Texas Family Code, **IT IS ORDERED** that C [REDACTED] N [REDACTED] shall pay child support for the child, K [REDACTED] N [REDACTED] as set forth in Attachment A to this Order, which is incorporated herein as if set out verbatim in this paragraph.

18.2. Pursuant to § 154.001 (a-1), Texas Family Code, **IT IS ORDERED** that R [REDACTED] LI [REDACTED] shall pay child support for the children as set forth in Attachment A to this Order, which is incorporated herein as if set out verbatim in this paragraph.

**19. Inheritance Rights**

This Order shall not affect the right of any child to inherit from and through any party.

**20. Denial of Other Relief**

**IT IS ORDERED** that all relief requested in this case and not expressly granted is denied.

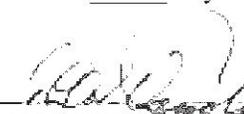
**21. WARNING: APPEAL OF FINAL ORDER, PURSUANT TO § 263.405, TFC**

**A PARTY AFFECTED BY THIS ORDER HAS THE RIGHT TO APPEAL. AN APPEAL IN A SUIT IN WHICH TERMINATION OF THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP IS SOUGHT IS GOVERNED BY THE PROCEDURES FOR ACCELERATED APPEALS IN CIVIL CASES UNDER THE TEXAS RULES OF APPELLATE PROCEDURE. FAILURE TO FOLLOW THE TEXAS RULES OF APPELLATE PROCEDURE FOR ACCELERATED APPEALS MAY RESULT IN THE DISMISSAL OF THE APPEAL.**

**22. NOTICE TO ANY PEACE OFFICER OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:**

**YOU MAY USE REASONABLE EFFORTS TO ENFORCE THE TERMS OF CHILD CUSTODY SPECIFIED IN THIS ORDER. A PEACE OFFICER WHO RELIES ON THE TERMS OF A COURT ORDER AND THE OFFICER'S AGENCY ARE ENTITLED TO THE APPLICABLE IMMUNITY AGAINST ANY CLAIM, CIVIL OR OTHERWISE, REGARDING THE OFFICER'S GOOD FAITH ACTS PERFORMED IN THE SCOPE OF THE OFFICER'S DUTIES IN ENFORCING THE TERMS OF THE ORDER THAT RELATE TO CHILD CUSTODY. ANY PERSON WHO KNOWINGLY PRESENTS FOR ENFORCEMENT AN ORDER THAT IS INVALID OR NO LONGER IN EFFECT COMMITS AN OFFENSE THAT MAY BE PUNISHABLE BY CONFINEMENT IN JAIL FOR AS LONG AS TWO YEARS AND A FINE OF AS MUCH AS \$10,000.**

SIGNED this 8th day of April, 2024.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
JUDGE PRESIDING

**ATTACHMENT A**

**Child Support**

**23. Child Support Obligation: C [REDACTED] N [REDACTED]**

23.1. The Court finds that C [REDACTED] N [REDACTED] is obligated to support K [REDACTED] N [REDACTED], a child the subject of this suit, pursuant to §154.001(a-1), Texas Family Code.

**23.2. Monthly Payments**

23.2.1. **IT IS ORDERED** that C [REDACTED] N [REDACTED] is obligated to pay and shall pay child support to **THE DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES** of \$187.47 per month for the support of K [REDACTED] N [REDACTED] with the first payment being due and payable on March 1, 2024, and a like payment being due and payable on the 1st day of each month thereafter until the first month following the date of the earliest occurrence of one of the events specified below:

23.2.1.1. any child reaches the age of eighteen years, provided that, if the child is fully enrolled in an accredited secondary school in a program leading toward a high school diploma, the periodic child support payments shall continue to be due and paid until the end of the month in which the child graduates;

23.2.1.2. any child marries;

23.2.1.3. any child dies;

23.2.1.4. any child's disabilities are otherwise removed for general purposes;

23.2.1.5. further order modifying this child support;

23.2.1.6. any child is dismissed from this action; or

23.2.1.7. the date on which the child begins active service in the armed forces, as defined by 10 U.S.C., Section 101.

**23.3. Notice of Change of Employer**

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that C [REDACTED] N [REDACTED] and his employer shall notify this Court and the Managing Conservator of the children the subject of this suit by U.S. certified mail, return receipt requested, of any termination of employment. This notice shall be given no later than seven days after the termination of employment, and shall include the current, or last known address of C [REDACTED] N [REDACTED] and the name and address of the new employer, if known. C [REDACTED] N [REDACTED] shall inform any subsequent employer of [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and the withholding order.

**24. Child Support Obligation: R [REDACTED] [REDACTED]**

24.1. The Court finds that R [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] is obligated to support K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED], K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED], AND K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] children the subject of this suit, pursuant to §154.001(a-1), Texas Family Code.

24.2. **Monthly Payments**

24.2.1. **IT IS ORDERED** that R [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] is obligated to pay and shall pay child support to **THE DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES** of **\$394.00** per month for the support of K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED], K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED], AND K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED], with the first payment being due and payable on March 1, 2024, and a like payment being due and payable on the 1st day of each month thereafter until the first month following the date of the earliest occurrence of one of the events specified below:

- 24.2.1.1. any child reaches the age of eighteen years, provided that, if the child is fully enrolled in an accredited secondary school in a program leading toward a high school diploma, the periodic child support payments shall continue to be due and paid until the end of the month in which the child graduates;
- 24.2.1.2. any child marries;
- 24.2.1.3. any child dies;
- 24.2.1.4. any child's disabilities are otherwise removed for general purposes;
- 24.2.1.5. further order modifying this child support;
- 24.2.1.6. any child is dismissed from this action; or
- 24.2.1.7. the date on which the child begins active service in the armed forces, as defined by 10 U.S.C., Section 101.

24.2.2. Thereafter, R [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] is **ORDERED** to pay child support of **\$323.84**, per month, for K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] due and payable on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the first month immediately following the date of the earliest occurrence of one of the events specified in items listed under **Monthly Payments** above and a like sum of **\$323.84** due and payable on the 1st day of each month thereafter until the next occurrence of the specified events.

24.2.3. Thereafter, R [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] is **ORDERED** to pay child support of **\$251.87**, per month, for K [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] due and payable on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the first month immediately following the date of the earliest occurrence of one of the events specified in items listed under **Monthly Payments** above and a like sum of **\$251.87** due and payable on the 1st day of each month thereafter until the next occurrence of one of the specified events.

24.3. **Notice of Change of Employer**

**IT IS FURTHER ORDERED** that R [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] and his employer shall notify this Court and the Managing Conservator of the children the subject of this suit by U.S. certified mail, return receipt requested, of any termination of employment. This notice shall be given no later than seven days after the termination of employment, and shall include the current, or last known address of R [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] and the name and address of the new employer, if known. R [REDACTED] L [REDACTED] shall inform any subsequent employer of this support obligation and the withholding order.

**25. Place and Manner of Payment of Child Support**

25.1. **IT IS ORDERED** that all child support payments are to be made through the **Texas Child Support State Disbursement Unit, P.O. Box 659791, San Antonio, Texas 78265-9791**, for distribution according to law.

**26. Statement on Guidelines**

To the extent that any support obligation specified above varies from the amount computed by applying the percentage guidelines in Chapter 154, Texas Family Code, the Court finds that the application of the percentage guidelines would be unjust or inappropriate, as more particularly shown in this Court's Findings on Child Support Order with respect to each obligor, which findings are incorporated herein as if set out verbatim in this paragraph.

**27. Statement On Modification**

**THE COURT MAY MODIFY THIS ORDER THAT PROVIDES FOR THE SUPPORT OF CHILDREN, IF:**

**27.1. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CHILDREN OR A PERSON AFFECTED BY THE ORDER HAVE MATERIALLY AND SUBSTANTIALLY CHANGED; OR**

**27.2. IT HAS BEEN THREE YEARS SINCE THE ORDER WAS RENDERED OR LAST MODIFIED AND THE MONTHLY AMOUNT OF THE CHILD SUPPORT AWARD UNDER THE ORDER DIFFERS BY EITHER 20 PERCENT OR \$100.00 FROM THE AMOUNT THAT WOULD BE AWARDED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CHILD SUPPORT GUIDELINES.**

**28. Termination of Duty of Support**

Pursuant to §154.006, Texas Family Code, unless otherwise agreed in writing or expressly provided in the order or as provided by Subsection (b), the child support order terminates on

28.1. any child reaches the age of eighteen years, provided that, if the child is fully enrolled in an accredited secondary school in a program leading toward a high school diploma, the periodic child support payments shall continue to be due and paid until the end of the month in which the child graduates;

28.2. any child marries;

28.3. any child dies;

28.4. any child's disabilities are otherwise removed for general purposes;

28.5. further order modifying this child support;

28.6. any child is dismissed from this action; or

28.7. the date on which the child begins active service in the armed forces, as defined by 10 U.S.C., Section 101.

No. 07-24-00146-CV

In the Interest of K.N., K.L., K.L., and  
K.L., Children

§

From the 223rd District Court  
of Gray County

§

September 19, 2024

§

Opinion by Chief Justice Quinn

§

**J U D G M E N T**

Pursuant to the opinion of the Court dated September 19, 2024, it is ordered, adjudged, and decreed that the orders of the trial court be affirmed.

Inasmuch as this is an appeal *in forma pauperis*, no costs beyond those that have already been paid are adjudged.

It is further ordered that this decision be certified below for observance.

o O o



**In The  
Court of Appeals  
Seventh District of Texas at Amarillo**

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No. 07-24-00146-CV

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**IN THE INTEREST OF K.N., K.L., K.L., AND K.L., CHILDREN**

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On Appeal from the 223rd District Court  
Gray County, Texas  
Trial Court No. 40,562, Honorable Phil N. Vanderpool, Presiding

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September 19, 2024

**MEMORANDUM OPINION**

Before QUINN, C.J., and PARKER and DOSS, JJ.

Mother, CN, and Father, RL, appeal the trial court's orders entered in this suit affecting the parent-child relationship. The matter involves four children. Each had the same mother, CN. One child, KN, had an "unknown" father.<sup>1</sup> The other three (KL1, KL2, and KL3 or the KL siblings) were fathered by RL. Upon trial, a jury found statutory grounds existed to terminate the parental relationship between him and the KL siblings. The best interests of those siblings also favored termination, according to the jury.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> The parental rights of the unknown father were terminated, as well. But, he did not appeal.

<sup>2</sup> The finding also encompassed the best interests of KN, though she was not the biological daughter of RL.

same is true regarding Mother and all four children, at least with regard to the existence of statutory grounds supporting termination. Despite two of those grounds implicating Mother's endangerment of each child, the jury decided that the best interests of the KL siblings did not favor termination, even though those of KN did. Confusing? Yes, but that is the framework within which we consider the separate issues of Mother and Father and, ultimately, affirm.

***Mother's Complaint about the Sufficiency of the Evidence***

Mother posits that the Department failed to present sufficient evidence supporting the two prongs implicit in terminating parental rights. Allegedly, the Department failed to prove a requisite statutory ground and that best interests of KN favored termination. We overrule the issue.

The standards for reviewing are well-established and described most recently in *In re J.F.-G.*, 627 S.W.3d 304 (Tex. 2021). We apply them here.

*Statutory Grounds*

The Texas Family Code permits termination if the parent knowingly placed or knowingly allowed a child to remain in conditions or surroundings which endanger the child's physical or emotional well-being. TEX. FAM. CODE ANN. § 161.001(b)(1)(D). It also provides for termination if the parent had engaged in conduct or knowingly placed the child with persons who engaged in conduct which endangers the child's physical or emotional well-being. See *id.* § 161.001(b)(1)(E). To endanger is to expose to loss or injury, to jeopardize. See *In re J.W.*, 645 S.W.3d 726, 748 (Tex. 2022). These were two of several grounds found by the jury.

Here, there is evidence that Mother's discipline of KN crossed the line into abuse in terms of lengthy wall stands or walls sits, by most accounts lasting for hours at a time, beatings with a belt, and kneeling on grains of dry rice for extended periods. Punishment of KN also included forms of food deprivation, that is, depriving KN of food given to other family members. School officials became concerned with the way KN would eat and her fear of her mother discovering that she ate breakfast at school. Other acts by Mother directed at KN included dragging the child by her hair, injuring her shoulder, and making her sleep in the dog's bed. Abusive or violent conduct by a parent can support a conclusion that a child's physical or emotional well-being was endangered. *In re McElhane*y, No. 07-04-0577-CV, 2005 Tex. App. LEXIS 236, at \*1–2 (Tex. App.—Amarillo Jan. 12, 2005, no pet.) (mem. op.).

When the Department got involved with the family, Mother refused to work any services or cooperate in any meaningful way. Instead, she and Father moved the children to Louisiana to escape what they considered interference by the Department. There, the children were kept out of school to prevent their detection by the Department. See *T.D. v. Tex. Dep't of Family & Protective Servs.*, 683 S.W.3d 901, 914 (Tex. App.—Austin 2024, no pet.) (observing that failing to educate children is endangering conduct). Evidence further illustrates that the children were in need of medical or dental care but were denied it. See *In re J.H.*, No. 07-21-00059-CV, 2021 Tex. App. LEXIS 5209, at \*9 n.4 (Tex. App.—Amarillo June 30, 2021, pet. denied) (mem. op.) (“[M]edical neglect endangers the children.”).

We add that Mother also twice confronted the school's staff member at the grocery store resulting in criminal charges being brought against her. Criminal conduct is relevant

to the endangerment analysis under subsections (D) and (E) as it subjects children to a life of uncertainty. See *In re B.J.F.*, No. 01-23-00522-CV, 2024 Tex. App. LEXIS 192, at \*78 (Tex. App.—Houston [1st Dist.] Jan. 11, 2024, pet. denied) (mem. op.).

We conclude that, based on the record before us, the evidence was legally and factually sufficient to enable a factfinder to form a firm conviction and belief that Mother endangered the physical well-being of KN. Because one predicate ground for termination is sufficient to support the decision, we need not address Mother’s issues challenging the sufficiency of the evidence to support the trial court’s findings under subsections (N) and (O). See *In re A.M.A.*, No. 07-16-00224-CV, 2016 Tex. App. LEXIS 10565, at \*9–10 (Tex. App.—Amarillo Sept. 27, 2016, pet. denied) (mem. op.) (citing *In re A.V.*, 113 S.W.3d 355, 362 (Tex. 2003)).

#### *Best Interest of the Child*

In addition to finding that a predicate ground supports termination, the trial court must also find by clear and convincing evidence that termination of the parent-child relationship favors the child’s best interest. See TEX. FAM. CODE ANN. § 161.001(b)(2). When assessing the evidence regarding the trial court’s best-interest determination, we consider the factors itemized in *Holley v. Adams*, 544 S.W.2d 367 (Tex. 1976).<sup>3</sup> Although those factors are not exhaustive, they indicate a number of considerations which either have been or would appear to be pertinent. *Holley*, 544 S.W.2d at 372. Additionally,

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<sup>3</sup> The *Holley* factors are as follows: 1) the desires of the child; 2) the emotional and physical needs of the child now and in the future; 3) the emotional and physical danger to the child now and in the future; 4) the parental abilities of the individuals seeking custody; 5) the programs available to assist these individuals to promote the best interest of the child; 6) the plans for the child by these individuals or by the agency seeking custody; 7) the stability of the home or proposed placement; 8) the acts or omissions of the parent which may indicate that the existing parent-child relationship is not a proper one; and 9) any excuse for the acts or omissions of the parent. *Holley*, 544 S.W.2d at 371–72.

evidence establishing the statutory grounds for termination may also be considered in the assessment of best interests. See *In re E.P.*, No. 07-23-00449-CV, 2024 Tex. App. LEXIS 3671, at \*5–6 (Tex. App.—Amarillo May 29, 2024, pet. denied) (mem. op.). Comparing the evidence described earlier with *Holley* and other relevant indicia leads us to conclude that the jury’s best interest finding had the support of both legally and factually sufficient evidence.

KN clearly expressed her fear of having to return to her mother’s care. So too were the children denied medical or dental care. The record indicates that the children’s current social, educational, medical, and emotional needs are being attended to in their current home. Furthermore, the abuse and danger posed by Mother to KN has been eliminated through the placement while the younger children are insulated from witnessing it. Though there is evidence that Mother undertook counseling outside the Department’s family services plan, her failure to complete other services also tips against her in the balance. See *In re D.C.*, 128 S.W.3d 707, 717 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2004, no pet.) (concluding that a parent’s refusal or inability to provide a stable home, remain gainfully employed, or comply with a court-ordered service plan supports a finding that termination is in the child’s best interest). And, again, both Mother and Father ignored the children’s educational needs by refusing to enroll them in school after moving to Louisiana. Mother’s acts and omissions that served to endanger KN’s physical and emotional well-being have been detailed above and need not be reiterated. They too support the decision that termination favors KN’s interests.

The maternal grandparents have provided a stable and loving environment for the children. Family friends, with whom the children have an established relationship, also

hope to care of the children as a unit to relieve the grandparents of the demands of raising four children. So too is the extended family committed to the children staying together.

In sum, the foregoing is legally and factually sufficient evidence to support both the finding that termination of the parent-child relationship between Mother and KN is in the latter's best interests and a statutory ground warranting termination. So, the purported error complained of by Mother is non-existent.

### ***Mother's Issue on Conservatorship***

As said earlier, the jury found that it was not in the best interests of the KL siblings to terminate Mother's parental rights. Because they remained intact, who to serve as their managing conservator remained an open question. Ultimately, the trial court designated the Department to so serve. Mother argues that the selection constituted an example of abused discretion. We overrule the issue.

Generally, to appoint one other than a parent as managing conservator, a preponderance of the evidence must illustrate that retaining the parent in that status would not be in the child's best interests because it would significantly impair the child's physical health or emotional development. See TEX. FAM. CODE ANN. §§ 105.005, 153.131(a), 263.404; *In re J.A.J.*, 243 S.W.3d 611, 614 (Tex. 2007). Evidence must support the logical inference that some specific, identifiable behavior or conduct of the parent, demonstrated by specific acts or omissions, will probably cause serious harm. *R.H. v. D.A.*, No. 03-16-00442-CV, 2017 Tex. App. LEXIS 1743, at \*10–11 (Tex. App.—Austin Mar. 2, 2017, pet. dismissed) (mem. op.). If such is found and the trial court appoints another, the determination is reviewed for abused discretion. See *In re J.A.J.*, 243 S.W.3d at 616. Within that setting, the legal insufficiency and factual insufficiency of the evidence

underlying the decision are merely relevant factors in the assessment, not independent grounds of error. See *In re A.M.*, 604 S.W.3d 192, 197 (Tex. App.—Amarillo 2020, pet. denied).

Acts or omissions that may significantly impair a child’s physical health or emotional development include, but are not limited to, physical abuse, severe neglect, abandonment, drug or alcohol abuse, parental irresponsibility, and bad judgment. See *In re M.L.*, No. 02-15-00258-CV, 2016 Tex. App. LEXIS 7189, at \*11 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth July 7, 2016, no pet.) (mem. op.); see also *In re J.Y.*, 528 S.W.3d 679, 687 (Tex. App.—Texarkana 2017, no pet.) (observing evidence of the mother’s “volatile emotions and erratic behavior” as relevant to the conservatorship determination); *In re S.T.*, 508 S.W.3d 482, 492 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2015, no pet.) (noting that a “parent’s treatment of other children may be relevant” when determining conservatorship). Courts also examine other considerations such as parental irresponsibility, a history of mental disorders and suicidal thoughts, frequent moves, bad judgment, child abandonment, and an unstable, disorganized, and chaotic lifestyle that has put and will continue to put the child at risk. *In re S.T.*, 508 S.W.3d at 492.

Here, the aforementioned abuse of KN and endangerment to which all the children were exposed, the medical or dental neglect suffered by the children, the educational neglect they experienced, Mother’s refusal to participate in services to improve her parenting skills, the parental decision to move the family to Louisiana to evade the Department’s supervision over the children, Mother’s anger issues exemplified by the physical punishment inflicted on KN, and her screaming threats publicly in a Walmart against someone who reported an instance of abuse to the Department constitute

evidence from which the jury (and court) could determine that appointing Mother as managing conservator would not serve the best interests of the children since it would significantly impair the children's physical health or emotional development.<sup>4</sup> See *In re E.M.T.*, No. 04-18-00805-CV, 2019 Tex. App. LEXIS 2358, at \*7 (Tex. App.—San Antonio Mar. 27, 2019, no pet.) (mem. op.) (noting evidence of the parent's anger and use of physical discipline as factors indicating the appointment of the parent as managing conservator would significantly impair the child's physical health and emotional development).

### ***Father's Sufficiency Contentions***

Father also challenges the sufficiency of the evidence to support termination of his parental rights to the KL siblings under subsections (D) and (E). We overrule the issue.

### ***Statutory Grounds***

We reiterate the evidence noted above and supporting the termination of Mother's parental rights to KN. Though Father was not directly involved in the abuse of KN, he was present when it occurred and knew of it. In fact, he acknowledged that Mother's behavior was aberrant and expressed that he had considered leaving with all the children, but his plans "never panned out." That is evidence of his knowingly placing the children with a person who engaged in conduct which endangered the children's physical or emotional well-being. See TEX. FAM. CODE ANN. § 161.001(b)(1)(E). He had a responsibility to the children to provide them a safe environment, free from abusive

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<sup>4</sup> Those threats resulted in criminal charges being filed against Mother. Additionally, Mother's own family expressed concerns regarding Mother's anger issues, explaining that it was difficult to maintain a relationship with her due to her anger and unpredictability. Whenever the family confronted Mother about her mistreatment of KN, she would scream and leave. Father also expressed some apprehension about Mother's anger, having stated to Mother's family that "at least it was [KN] and not him getting in trouble."

behavior. See *In re C.N.L.*, No. 13-23-00591-CV, 2024 Tex. App. LEXIS 2860, at \*11 (Tex. App.—Corpus Christi Apr. 25, 2024, no pet.) (mem. op.) (a child’s physical or emotional well-being is endangered when a parent fails to remove them from a home in which abusive or violent conduct is occurring). And, in that responsibility, he failed.

Additionally, the Department curtailed his visitations with the children due to a positive drug test for amphetamine. Though claiming it to be the result of ingesting prescribed medication, he refused to sign a medical release that would permit the Department to confirm his excuse. And, evidence of his arrest in Louisiana for aggravated flight from an officer, reckless operation, **and possession of methamphetamine** should not be ignored. See *In re McElhaney*, 2005 Tex. App. LEXIS 236, at \*1–2; see also *In re B.J.F.*, 2024 Tex. App. LEXIS 192, at \*78 (“A parent’s criminal conduct, convictions, and imprisonment also endangers [sic] a child’s physical and emotional well-being because it subjects the child to a life of uncertainty and instability.”). That he was found with the illegal contraband of methamphetamine when arrested tends to rebut his suggestion that the earlier, positive drug test for amphetamine was the result of ingesting prescribed medication.

We further note his 1) failure to participate in any services offered by the Department, 2) involvement in thwarting the Department’s effort to care for the children by moving them to Louisiana, and 3) involvement in restricting the children from attending school to further evade the Department. So too did he neglect the children’s medical and dental needs.

Together, the foregoing constituted evidence permitting a rational factfinder to form a firm conviction and belief that termination was warranted under subsections (D) and (E). Father's contention otherwise is simply wrong.

*Best Interests of the Children*

We reiterate the *Holley* factors mentioned earlier. Comparing them to the evidence of record, we too conclude that the jury had ample basis to clearly and convincingly find that termination of the parental relationship served the best interests of the KL siblings. That evidence included 1) Father's endangerment of the children's physical and emotional well-being, 2) his failure to meet their medical, dental, and educational needs, 3) his continued criminal behavior, 4) his seeming effort to defend or excuse the actions of Mother, 5) his participation in the removal of the children from the Department's jurisdiction, 6) his refusal to perform services, and 7) the beneficial current placement of the children.

***Admission of Police Report***

Father also complains about the admission of a Louisiana police report involving his pursuit and eventual arrest in that state. Yet, it was not the sole evidence of that escapade. The officer who authored the report testified, without objection, about the attempted traffic stop of Father, the ensuing high-speed pursuit, his apprehension and arrest, and the discovery of approximately four grams of methamphetamine in Father's pocket. Purported error concerning the admission of evidence is harmless when other like evidence is admitted without objection. See *In re L.T.*, No. 07-09-0280-CV, 2010 Tex. App. LEXIS 2250, at \*10 (Tex. App.—Amarillo Mar. 30, 2010, no pet.) (mem. op.). That

having occurred here, we overrule Father's complaint about admitting the police report itself.

***Father as Managing Conservator***

Father seems to contend through his fifth issue that the trial court erred in failing to appoint him managing conservator. To the extent he does, we overrule the issue based upon 1) the very evidence supporting the termination of his parental rights and 2) the evidence supporting the appointment in lieu of Mother. Our incorporating that evidence here leads us to conclude that the trial court did not abuse its discretion in appointing the Department managing conservator of the children. See *In re C.N.S.*, No. 14-14-00301-CV, 2014 Tex. App. LEXIS 8612, at \*33 (Tex. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] Aug. 7, 2014, no pet.) (mem. op.) (holding that the very evidence supporting termination insulated the decision to appoint the Department as managing conservator from an allegation of abused discretion).

***Mother's and Father's Common Issue: Exclusion of Administrative Review Report***

Finally, both Father and Mother argue that the trial court erred in excluding from evidence a report about an administrative review and investigative findings. The report allegedly illustrated that an earlier finding by the Department about an instance of emotional abuse between Mother and KN had been reversed. The trial court excluded the evidence, conceding that it may bear some relevance but concluding its probative value was substantially outweighed by a danger of unfair prejudice and confusing the issues. See TEX. R. EVID. 403. Other reasons were also revealed by the trial court for excluding the report. They included hearsay and the lack of evidence qualifying the investigator issuing the report as an expert. In reviewing the trial court's decision, we

again apply the standard of abused discretion. *In re D.D.*, No. 02-17-00368-CV, 2018 Tex. App. LEXIS 2440, at \*34 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth Apr. 5, 2018, no pet.) (mem. op.) (per curiam) (so requiring). And, upon doing so, we overrule the issue.

The administrative report in question indicated that an investigator ruled out evidence of emotional abuse. Apparently, “emotional abuse” for the Department’s administrative purposes, consisted of establishing that the parent “caused a mental or emotional injury to her daughter that resulted in an observable and material impairment in her growth.” Explicit within that test is proof of actual injury, that is, “observable” “mental or emotional injury” resulting in material impairment. Yet, statute permits termination for “endanger[ing] the physical or emotional well-being of the child.” TEX. FAM. CODE ANN. § 161.001(b)(1)(D), (E). Though endangering requires more than a threat of metaphysical injury or the possible ill effects of a questionable family environment, the child need not suffer actual injury to satisfy the parameters of either (D) or (E). *In re J.J.*, No. 07-13-00117-CV, 2013 Tex. App. LEXIS 11194, at \*10–11 (Tex. App.—Amarillo Aug. 29, 2013, no pet.) (mem. op.). So, the test utilized when determining whether to terminate a parental relationship under the Family Code significantly differs from that used by the Department in conducting its administrative affairs. The differing tests (i.e., the need for trauma in the administrative setting versus the lack of need in the judicial setting) therefore minimizes the relevance of the report in a termination trial. Utilizing it here to bar termination under either (D) or (E) is like proving a piece of fruit is not an apple by showing it is not an orange. One could reasonably view such a comparison as likely to interject confusion; this is especially so when, like here, the administrative finding was based not

on the lack of questionable conduct but rather the lack of injury from that conduct.<sup>5</sup> Given these circumstances, we cannot say that a trial court’s exclusion of the report under Rule 403 because its nominal relevance was substantially outweighed by the risk of confusing the issues would be unreasonable or an abuse of discretion.

Before closing, though, we note another matter. Interestingly, the same report continued with: “[i]t should be noted that by no means does changing the disposition to Rule Out negate the fact that **risk was identified** by the investigator and services were recommended for this family.” (Emphasis added). Logically, the existence of a “risk” furthers the notion of endangerment. That is, to “endanger” means to expose to loss or injury or to jeopardize. *Id.* at \*10-11. Exposing one to a risk of emotional harm nudges the conduct closer towards the line of endangerment contemplated under (D) and (E). So, admitting the report could well have fostered the Department’s position, which, in turn, means excluding it from evidence minimized any harm to Mother or Father.

Having overruled the issues presented by both Mother and Father, we affirm the trial court’s orders.

Brian Quinn  
Chief Justice

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<sup>5</sup> The reported stated: “There is insufficient evidence that [KN] experienced significant or serious negative effects on her intellectual or psychological development or functioning.”

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