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SUDC Foundation, Fairfax County Police Department and Virginia Office of the Chief Medical Examiner Partner to Strengthen Response to Sudden Unexpected Child Deaths

Inaugural multidisciplinary workshop brings together first responders, medicolegal professionals, clinicians, families and community organizations

FAIRFAX COUNTY, Va. — August 14, 2026 — The Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC) Foundation, in partnership with the Fairfax County Police Department and the Virginia Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, convened an inaugural multidisciplinary workshop focused on strengthening the response to sudden and unexpected child deaths.

Responding to Sudden Unexpected Child Death Scenes: Investigation, Communication, and Family-Centered Care brought together approximately 100 first responders and medicolegal professionals for education and discussion focused on thorough death investigation, communication with families, interdisciplinary collaboration, and family-centered care.

“First responders and medicolegal professionals have an extraordinary responsibility when responding to the sudden and unexpected death of a child,” said Tina Yun Lee, CEO of the SUDC Foundation. “A thorough investigation is critical, but so are the words, actions, and interactions families experience during those first hours. We believe the strongest response is informed, interdisciplinary, trauma-informed and family-centered - bringing together professional expertise and the lived experiences of families.”

The workshop was spearheaded by Investigator Mary T. A. Weldon, MS, F-ABMDI, of the Fairfax County Police Department, who recognized an opportunity to bring together the professionals and agencies involved following a sudden unexpected child death and strengthen collaboration across disciplines.

“When we respond to the sudden and unexpected death of a child, we have a responsibility to conduct a thorough investigation while never losing sight of the family experiencing the most devastating moment of their lives,” said Investigator Weldon. “I wanted to bring this training to Fairfax County because these cases require both investigative rigor and thoughtful communication. Bringing first responders, medicolegal professionals, clinicians and families together gives us an opportunity to learn from one another and strengthen how we respond.”

The training also reflects the Fairfax County Police Department's broader commitment to professional development and strengthening the ways officers serve their community.

“The sudden death of a child is among the most difficult calls our officers will ever respond to,” said Fairfax County Chief of Police Kevin Davis. “We have a responsibility to ensure they are equipped not only with the investigative skills these cases demand, but with an understanding of

the profound impact their response can have on a family. This collaboration reflects our commitment to meaningful training and to continually strengthening how we serve the Fairfax County community.”

The workshop featured Investigator Weldon; Investigators Paige Bakatsias and Paola Cruz Maldonado of the Virginia Office of the Chief Medical Examiner; and Florencia Segura, MD, FAAP, a board-certified pediatrician and SUDC mother to Rosalie.

Bringing the Family Voice into Professional Education

A central component of the workshop was hearing directly from families whose children died suddenly and unexpectedly.

Dr. Segura spoke not only as a pediatrician, but as Rosalie's mother, sharing her family's experience with those who may one day find themselves responding to another family's tragedy.

Miranda Magdangal, SUDC mother to Ezra, who was unable to attend in person, shared her family's experience through a recorded presentation. Matthew White, President and Chief Operating Officer of EyeCare Partners and SUDC father to Preston, also shared his family's story with participants.

The inclusion of families alongside investigators, clinicians and medicolegal professionals reflects the SUDC Foundation's commitment to ensuring that the lived experiences of families help inform education and systems of care.

“We are deeply grateful to the families who entrusted us not only with their experiences, but most importantly, with the stories of their children,” Lee said. “Their voices bring an understanding to this work that cannot come from protocols or textbooks alone.”

Building a More Coordinated Response

The workshop emphasized that responding to a sudden unexpected child death extends beyond the scene investigation. Families may interact with law enforcement, emergency medical personnel, medical examiners, healthcare providers and community organizations during and following the death of their child.

Several community-based organizations participated in the workshop through resource tables, helping connect first responders and medicolegal professionals with resources they may be able to share with families following a child's death.

Participating organizations included Child Loss Foundation, First Candle, George Mason University's Center for Community Mental Health, Haven of Northern Virginia, NAMI Northern Virginia and Star Legacy Foundation.

From Family Experience to Systems Change

The Foundation previously surveyed SUDC families regarding their experiences with first responders. Findings from that work contributed to a paper that has been accepted for publication in a peer-reviewed grief journal. The Fairfax workshop represents an opportunity to begin translating those insights into professional education and practice.

The SUDC Foundation is also evaluating the workshop through participant feedback to better understand its impact and help inform future educational efforts. Findings from the inaugural training will help guide opportunities to refine and replicate the multidisciplinary model to communities across the United States.

The workshop was made possible with generous support from **Love Like Rosie**.

About Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood

Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood (SUDC) is a category of death in children age 12 months or older that remains unexplained after a thorough case investigation, including a performance of a complete autopsy, examination of the death scene, and clinical history review.

About the SUDC Foundation

The Sudden Unexplained Death in Childhood Foundation is dedicated to raising awareness, and funding research, and serving those affected by Sudden Unexplained Death In Childhood (SUDC). The Foundation works alongside families, researchers, clinicians, medicolegal professionals, first responders and other partners to advance understanding of SUDC and strengthen the systems that support children and families. All services are provided at no cost to the people the Foundation serves.

For more information, please visit: sudc.org

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