

Michigan Couple Are Charged With Murder After Death of Morbidly Obese Son

Seven-year-old Casper O'Brien weighed 255 pounds when he died last year. Prosecutors said he was bedridden and subsisted on little more than snack foods.



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A Michigan couple have been charged with murder, child abuse and torture in connection with the death last year of their 7-year-old son, who at the time weighed 255 pounds, according to court filings.

The boy, Casper O'Brien, died on Nov. 4, 2025, after the authorities responded to a 911 call earlier that day that he was not breathing at the Flint Township home he shared with his parents, Damien and Jessica O'Brien, according to the authorities.

An autopsy report from the Genesee County medical examiner concluded that Casper had died of dilated cardiomyopathy — an enlarged and weakened heart — brought on by morbid obesity.

Casper was bedridden at the time of his death, and subsisted on little more than snack foods, the Genesee County prosecutor, David S. Leyton, said in an interview on Saturday.

The child was not enrolled in school and received little to no medical care despite having a history of nonverbal autism, according to prosecutors and the autopsy report from the medical examiner, John Bechinski.

“This was a sad and horrific case involving the wanton and willful neglect by two parents for the care, welfare and medical needs of their son,” Mr. Leyton said in an emailed statement. “Their neglect led to their child suffering severe bed sores, various rashes and other physical health disorders.”

Prosecutors charged the parents with second-degree murder and three counts of second-degree child abuse. They were also charged with torture.

If convicted of the murder and torture charges, they face the possibility of life in prison.

In a statement, Mr. O’Brien’s lawyer, Elias Fanous, said that it would be “premature to comment on the allegations and charges that Mr. O’Brien is facing.”

“As in all criminal matters, Mr. O’Brien is presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law,” Mr. Fanous said.

Ms. O’Brien’s lawyer, Tracey Guisbert, said that cases like this tended to “develop slowly” and that it was therefore too early to comment. “This is a tragic situation,” she added.

Casper was living in an environment of profound disarray and neglect at the time of his death, according to prosecutors and the autopsy report.

His parents were hoarders, Mr. Leyton said, which made it very difficult for medical personnel to maneuver around the home in November.

Police officers and child protective services workers found the home, which Casper also shared with his uncle and 5-year-old sister, Illeana, to be “absolutely disgusting” and “deplorable,” according to the report, with trash piled nearly everywhere.

Casper did not like water or getting wet, which made bathing him difficult, according to the report. Instead, Ms. O'Brien, 41, cleaned him with wipes.

Though Mr. O'Brien, 40, had health coverage — Mr. Leyton called his insurance “as good as it gets” — through his job as an information technology worker for the insurance company Delta Dental, Casper received very little medical care, prosecutors said.

The boy was last seen by a primary care doctor on Feb. 12, 2024, when he was diagnosed with an acute cough, throat congestion and “metabolic disease,” according to the autopsy report.

Casper weighed a little over 104 pounds at the time, which means the boy — who was 4 feet 2 inches tall when he died — gained roughly 150 pounds in less than two years. His diet consisted largely of potato chips and French fries, according to the report.

Mr. and Ms. O'Brien were also charged with the abuse and neglect of Casper's sister, Illeana, who was found naked, dirty and morbidly obese when the authorities responded to the 911 call in November, according to prosecutors. She is in temporary foster care and doing well, Mr. Leyton said.

Casper's uncle has not been charged with any wrongdoing, prosecutors said.

Mr. Leyton said that the family's landlord, who happened to drive by their home during Casper's medical emergency, told the authorities at the time that he had not been able to enter the house and that the family had been leaving the rent on the front porch.

Mr. Leyton said that in his 22 years as a prosecutor, he had never seen anything quite like the O'Brien case.

“Just when you think you've seen it all, something like this comes along,” he said.