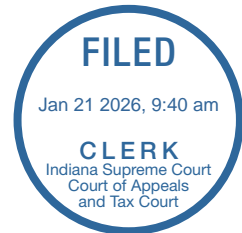


MEMORANDUM DECISION

Pursuant to Ind. Appellate Rule 65(D), this Memorandum Decision is not binding precedent for any court and may be cited only for persuasive value or to establish res judicata, collateral estoppel, or law of the case.



IN THE Court of Appeals of Indiana

Samuel Carlos Edwards,
Appellant-Defendant

v.

State of Indiana,
Appellee-Plaintiff

January 21, 2026

Court of Appeals Case No.
25A-CR-1259

Appeal from the Lake Superior Court
The Honorable Natalie Bokota, Judge

Trial Court Cause No.
45G02-2301-MR-3

Memorandum Decision by Judge Brown
Judges Felix and Scheele concur.

Brown, Judge.

- [1] Samuel Carlos Edwards appeals his convictions for five counts of neglect of a dependent as level 6 felonies.¹ He contends that the State presented insufficient evidence to support his convictions. We affirm.

Facts and Procedural History

- [2] On December 27, 2022, Edwards shot and killed his partner, Ieshia Jefferson, while their five children, ages one to six years old, were watching cartoons in the next room. After shooting and killing Jefferson, Edwards fled from the home, leaving his children alone in the home with their mother's dead body, and he called one of his relatives at approximately 12:11 a.m. At approximately 12:36 a.m., Edwards called 911 and reported that he heard some "shots" in the area of the home and gave dispatch the address. State's Exhibit 2 at 00:55. When the dispatcher asked him for more information, Edwards said that he "did not know" and that he "wasn't even there" before hanging up. *Id.* at 00:52-00:56. The dispatcher tried to call Edwards back multiple times, but Edwards did not answer.
- [3] Gary Police Sergeant Silas Simpson arrived at the home at approximately 12:55 a.m. He entered the home and located "five young children" huddled together "in the bedroom which door opens up to the living room area," who were

¹ Edwards was also convicted of murder. He does not appeal that conviction.

looking in the direction of Jefferson, who was “unresponsive” and lying “on the floor in that living room area.” Transcript Volume III at 16, 22. Sergeant Simpson observed that Jefferson appeared to be “bleeding from her nose and her head,” and lying in a pool of blood, and he determined she did not have a pulse and she was not breathing. *Id.* at 23. Sergeant Simpson attempted to speak to the children but most of them were unable to speak “in a coherent manner” under the circumstances. *Id.* at 32. The children all appeared “very sad” and “teary-eyed,” and the one-year-old was crying. *Id.* Five-year-old I.E. was able to tell Sergeant Simpson that “Sam had a black gun,” that “Sam shot Eesha,” and that she heard a gunshot, looked underneath the door, and saw her mother drop to the floor. *Id.* at 35. I.E. explained that “Eesha” was her mother, Jefferson, and “Sam” was her father, Edwards. *Id.* The children had not eaten so the police fed the children food from McDonald’s until the Department of Child Services arrived to remove the children from the home.

[4] On January 13, 2023, the State charged Edwards with murder, domestic battery as a class A misdemeanor, and five counts of neglect of a dependent as level 6 felonies. The State also filed a notice of intent to seek an enhanced sentence due to Edwards’s use of a firearm. The State subsequently dismissed the domestic battery charge, and a jury trial was held on March 10, 2025. The jury found Edwards guilty on all remaining charges. After Edwards waived his right to a jury trial on the firearm enhancement, a bench trial proceeded and the court found that Edwards was eligible for the firearm enhancement due to his use of a firearm in the commission of the murder. Following a sentencing

hearing, the court sentenced Edwards to an aggregate sentence of ninety-two and one-half years.

Discussion

- [5] Edwards challenges the sufficiency of the evidence to support his convictions for neglect of a dependent as level 6 felonies. When reviewing claims of insufficiency of the evidence, we do not reweigh the evidence or judge the credibility of witnesses. *Jordan v. State*, 656 N.E.2d 816, 817 (Ind. 1995), *reh'g denied*. We look to the evidence and the reasonable inferences therefrom that support the verdict. *Id.* The conviction will be affirmed if there exists evidence of probative value from which a reasonable jury could find the defendant guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. *Id.*
- [6] To convict Edwards of neglect of a dependent as a level 6 felony, the State was required to prove that Edwards, having the care of a dependent, whether assumed voluntarily or because of legal obligation, knowingly placed the dependent in a situation that endangered the dependent's life or health. Ind. Code § 35-46-1-4(a)(1). Edwards does not dispute that his five children were in his care or that they qualified as dependents. Rather, he contends the State failed to present sufficient evidence that he knowingly placed them in a situation that endangered their lives or health because he only left them alone in the home for "a roughly forty-minute period." Appellant's Brief at 9.
- [7] "A person engages in conduct 'knowingly' if, when he engages in the conduct, he is aware of a high probability that he is doing so." Ind. Code § 35-41-2-2(b).

“Knowledge and intent are both mental states and, absent an admission by the defendant, the jury must resort to the reasonable inferences from both the direct and circumstantial evidence to determine whether the defendant has the requisite knowledge or intent to commit the offense in question.” *Konkle v. State*, 253 N.E.3d 1068, 1091 (Ind. 2025) (citation omitted). “Under the child neglect statute a ‘knowing’ mens rea requires a subjective awareness of a ‘high probability’ that a dependent had been placed in a dangerous situation.” *Pierson v. State*, 73 N.E.3d 737, 741 (Ind. Ct. App. 2017), *trans. denied*.

- [8] This Court has repeatedly held the child neglect statute “must be read as applying only to situations that expose a dependent to an ‘actual and appreciable’ danger to life or health.” *Becklehimer v. State*, 190 N.E.3d 975, 978 (Ind. Ct. App. 2022) (citation omitted). As observed by the State, under the neglect statute, “health is not limited to one’s physical state, but includes an individual’s psychological, mental and emotional status.” *G.C.G. v. State*, 817 N.E.2d 306, 308 (Ind. Ct. App. 2004). To be in “actual and appreciable” danger, the child “must be exposed to some risk of physical or mental harm that goes substantially beyond the normal risk of bumps, bruises, or even worse that accompany the activities of the average child.” *Becklehimer*, 190 N.E.3d at 978. But the State does not have to wait for the harm to come to fruition before it may intervene. *See id.* at 979 (explaining purpose of the neglect statute is to “‘authorize the intervention of the police power to prevent harmful consequences and injury to dependents’ without having to wait for actual loss of life or limb”) (quoting *G.C.G.*, 817 N.E.2d at 309). In the end, there is “a fine

line between properly exercising the police power to protect dependents and improperly subjecting every mistake a parent may make in raising his or her child to prosecutorial scrutiny.” *Id.* at 981 (quoting *G.C.G.*, 817 N.E.2d at 311).

[9] Here, the State presented evidence that, after shooting and killing Jefferson in earshot of his five young children, Edwards fled the home, leaving the five children, ranging in age from one to six years old, alone in the home in a room right next to where their mother’s dead body remained lying in a pool of blood. While Edwards suggests that his 911 call indicates that he did not believe he was leaving the children in a dangerous situation, we observe that Edwards simply informed dispatch that he heard shots in the area and he did not reveal that a woman had been murdered or that five very young children had been left unattended. Edwards also hung up on dispatch when more information was requested and ignored multiple attempts by dispatch to contact him for that vital information. Although police responded to the scene relatively quickly, that was not due to any actions by Edwards to protect the children from the dangerous situation he created.

[10] To the extent that Edwards suggests that there was no evidence that the children’s physical, mental, or emotional health was actually harmed as a result of his actions, as already noted, the State was not required to prove actual harm. A reasonable jury could infer from the evidence presented that Edwards was aware of a high probability that he placed his five dependents in a dangerous situation that posed a risk to their mental, emotional, or physical health when he murdered the children’s mother, fled the scene, and left them

alone in the home with their mother’s dead body. Under the circumstances, we conclude the State presented sufficient evidence that Edwards knowingly endangered his five dependents’ life and/or health.² Edwards’s assertions to the contrary are merely requests that we reweigh the evidence, which is not our prerogative on appeal.

[11] For the foregoing reasons, we affirm Edwards’s convictions.

[12] Affirmed.

Felix, J., and Scheele, J., concur.

ATTORNEY FOR APPELLANT

Sean C. Mullins
Appellate Public Defender
Crown Point, Indiana

ATTORNEYS FOR APPELLEE

Theodore E. Rokita
Attorney General of Indiana

Courtney Staton
Supervising Deputy Attorney General
Indianapolis, Indiana

² To the extent Edwards relies on *Scruggs v. State*, 883 N.E.2d 189 (Ind. Ct. App. 2008), *reh’g denied, trans. denied*, for the proposition that this Court “has rejected a *per se* rule” that leaving young children home alone “for any period is neglect,” *see* Appellant’s Brief at 10, we find that case factually distinguishable and its reasoning inapplicable to the current case.