



Death exposes Mpls. policing gap

Slain woman’s domestic violence case saw little follow-up. That’s not uncommon.

By LIZ SAWYER
The Minnesota Star Tribune

After seven months, Mariah Samuels wanted out. So she called her boyfriend, David Wright, to end the turbulent relationship. That same night in August, Wright tracked Samuels to a

north Minneapolis home where she was dropping off her 11-year-old son. When she stepped outside, Wright pistol-whipped her, threw her against a fence and grabbed her by the throat, she later alleged in a no-contact order. She called police, but he fled before they arrived. Samuels did everything a

domestic violence victim is supposed to do. She cooperated with the responding Minneapolis police officer, whose risk assessment revealed that Wright posed a serious threat to her safety. Her friend, who witnessed the attack over FaceTime, gave a statement. A nearby surveillance camera

captured video of the assault. But an investigator was never assigned to the case. Three weeks later, Samuels was shot 10 times and killed outside her own home – just hours after calling 911 again to report that Wright had violated a restraining order. He now stands charged with her murder.

“She called the police because she was scared,” said her sister, Salina Owens. “They didn’t do their job. That’s just the bottom line.” The case exposes longstanding gaps in the way Minneapolis police investigate domestic violence. A sizable backlog leaves domestic calls sitting, sometimes for weeks on end, without proper follow-up by the

depleted agency. In response to findings by the Minnesota Star Tribune, Chief Brian O’Hara has ordered a thorough review of the department’s handling of Samuels’ case and is directing every officer in the police force to be retrained on domestic violence protocols by the end of 2025. Just five investigators staff **SEE SAMUELS ON A10 »**

With aid nearing end, counties scramble to help with food



JERRY HOLT • The Minnesota Star Tribune

Open Door food shelf staff member Ian Danielson gathers items Monday in Eagan. There are fewer nonprofits and local funding to make up the difference in rural counties.

More Minnesotans soon to be at risk with benefits programs running out of funding.

By NATHANIEL MINOR • The Minnesota Star Tribune

Crucial government programs that feed families and heat homes are among those that will start to run out of money on Saturday as the federal government shutdown drags on. Democrats in the U.S. Senate have refused to vote for a spending plan that would reopen the government, demanding that Republicans extend health insurance subsidies that would hold down the cost of plans offered through the Afford-

able Care Act. Republicans have declined to negotiate on that point, saying the government should be reopened first. In the meantime, the effects of the shutdown are trickling down to more Minnesotans. Already, hundreds of thousands of federal workers are on furlough or working without pay across the country. Now, some key benefits **SEE SHUTDOWN ON A13 »**

Pending loss amid shutdown could hit rural Minn. hardest but will be felt widely.

By TREY MEWES and EMMA RITTER • The Minnesota Star Tribune

Ronda Elstad is on disability and relies completely on the federal food benefit she receives at the beginning of every month to get her groceries. But the 65-year-old Duluth woman learned recently that money will run out in November unless the federal government shutdown ends. Without the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit, Elstad said, she will have to depend on food shelves. **SEE SNAP ON A12 »**

“It’s taking away a huge chunk of people’s dignity, and you’re going to see people suffering,” Elstad said. “We already cut back. People were already cutting their corners.” The warnings are dire for more than 440,000 low-income Minnesotans receiving federal food assistance as the government shutdown continues. It could hurt even worse for those in greater Minnesota, **SEE SNAP ON A12 »**

State halts payments over fraud concerns

14 high-risk Medicaid programs will undergo a third-party audit.

By RYAN FAIRCLOTH
The Minnesota Star Tribune

Minnesota is pausing payments to providers in 14 Medicaid programs and is ordering a third-party audit of their billing as the state seeks to crack down on fraud. The payment pause will last up to 90 days to give the state time to detect suspicious billing. DFL Gov. Tim Walz said Wednesday the state has contracted with health services and technology company Optum to analyze Medicaid claim data in these programs and flag issues to the Department of Human Services (DHS) for review. The one-year contract with Optum will cost \$2.3 million, officials said. “We cannot effectively deliver programs and services if they don’t have the backing of the public’s trust,” Walz said in a statement. “In order to restore that trust we are pumping the brakes on 14 programs that were created to help the most disadvantaged among us, yet have become the target of criminal activity.” The move comes as several Republican candidates for governor are highlighting fraud cases, which they believe will be a major liability for Walz as he runs for a third consecutive four-year term. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been stolen from state-run programs in recent years, starting with the swindling of \$250 million in federal funds meant to feed children during the pandemic – known as the Feeding Our Future scheme – to more recent cases in Minnesota’s autism and housing services programs. The Walz administration previously made moves to shut **SEE FRAUD ON A8 »**

Melissa leaves dozens dead in Caribbean trail of destruction

Story by ARIEL FERNÁNDEZ, ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ, JOHN MYERS JR. and EVENS SANON
Photo by MATIAS DELACROIX • The Associated Press

SANTIAGO DE CUBA, CUBA – Hurricane Melissa left at least dozens dead and caused widespread destruction across Cuba, Haiti and Jamaica, where roofless homes, toppled utility poles and waterlogged furniture dominated the landscape Wednesday. A landslide blocked the main roads of Santa Cruz in Jamaica’s St. Elizabeth parish, where the streets were reduced to mud

pits. Residents swept water from homes as they tried to salvage belongings. Wind ripped off part of the roof at a high school that serves as a public shelter. “I never see anything like this before in all my years living here,” resident Jennifer Small said. The extent of the damage from the deadly hurricane was unclear Wednesday as wide-

spread power outages and dangerous conditions persisted in the region. “It is too early for us to say definitively,” said Dana Morris Dixon, Jamaica’s education minister. Melissa made landfall Tuesday in Jamaica as a Category 5 hurricane with top winds of 185 mph, one of the strongest **SEE MELISSA ON A8 »**



Residents walk through Lacovia Tombstone, Jamaica, on Wednesday in the aftermath of Hurricane Melissa.