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SPORTS, 1B

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## Feds to TN: Stop taking orphans' benefits

### Kids in state care saw more than \$31.5M in payments taken since 2019

**Vivian Jones**

Nashville Tennessean  
USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

After Tennessee diverted more than \$31.5 million in benefits from orphans in state care since 2019, federal officials are telling the Lee administration to stop confiscating those survivor benefits, saying the state's existing policy is "con-

trary to the best interests of children."

When guardians of a child in custody of the Department of Children's Services die, that child is entitled to federal Social Security survivor benefits.

In Tennessee, instead of ensuring the funds are maintained to support the child, DCS uses survivor benefits to care for children until they leave custody or turn 18. Leftover funds are then returned

to the Social Security Administration.

Between 2019 and 2024, Tennessee collected \$31.5 million in Social Security benefits for orphan children in state custody, and spent \$20.8 million toward their care, averaging \$42,000 per recipient child.

Four months ago, Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary Alex Adams for the Administration of Children

and Families wrote to Gov. Bill Lee calling for him to stop confiscating Social Security survivor benefits from the state's most vulnerable population.

"This practice is contrary to the best interests of children, and we are working to put an end to this practice," Adams wrote in a letter dated Dec. 8.

Adams offered to share resources "to help your state change this practice," including "executive order templates

See **ORPHANS**, Page 8A



Joseph Mazori, 7, holds out the flag of Kurdistan from his father's truck during the Kurdish holiday, Newroz, fire lighting ceremony at Whitfield Park in Nashville on March, 20. PHOTOS BY NICOLE HESTER/THE TENNESSEAN

## Record \$3.1M fine issued after fatal TN plant explosion

**Kelly Puente and Evan Mealins**  
USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

The Tennessee Occupational Safety and Health Administration (TOSHA) has issued more than \$3.1 million in penalties to a Tennessee explosives plant where 16 workers were killed in a massive explosion.

The Oct. 10 blast at Accurate Energetic Systems leveled a production building on the company's 1,300 acre campus near the town of McEwen west of Nashville. It clocked a 1.6 magnitude on the Richter scale and ranks among the deadliest industrial disasters in U.S. history.

The six-month investigation into the explosion is the largest conducted by TOSHA and resulted in the agency's highest ever total penalty, TOSHA said in an April 7 statement.

AES CEO Wendell Stinson in a statement said the company is carefully reviewing the findings.

"We believe that TOSHA's findings do not represent the standard of safety we strive to achieve every day, nor our commitment to the wellbeing of our team members and their loved ones," the company said, adding that it continues to investigate what caused the explosion.

The penalties included \$3 million in 59 "willful violations," which indicate an employer's "intentional disregard" for employee safety laws. The penalties also included more than \$93,000 in 32 serious violations and \$39,200 in repeat-serious violations.

AES manufactures explosives for the government and demolitions crews. At the time of the explosion, workers were producing cast boosters, explosive charges used in industrial and military applications.

The manufacturing process involved melting explosive materials in large kettles, transferring the molten mixture and pouring it by hand into tubes where it hardened.

### 'Explosive dust on surfaces'

A review of more than a hundred pages of TOSHA citations issued to AES in the investigation showed a range of safety issues.

See **RECORD FINE**, Page 8A

## 'We feel there is no plan'

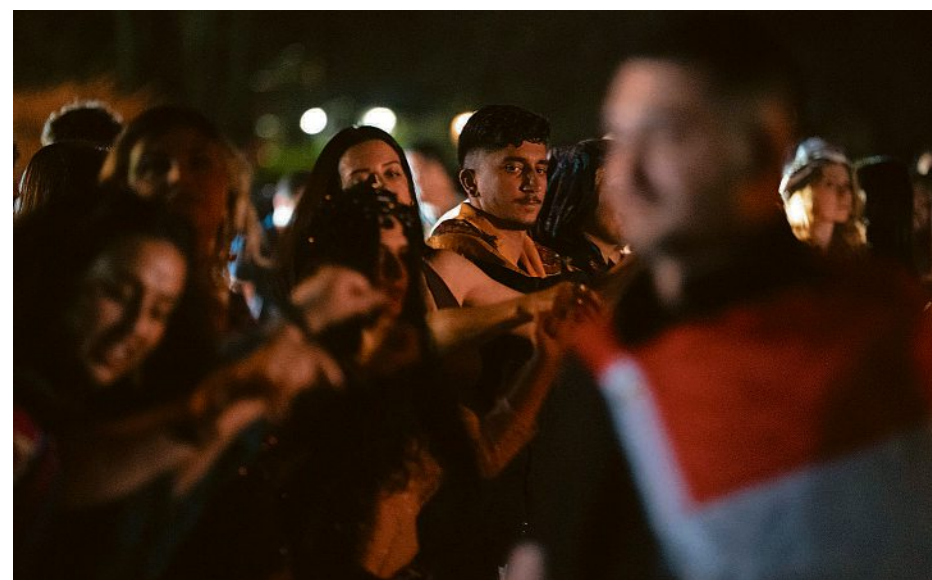
### Nashville's Kurds and Iranian-Americans react to latest from Iran war

**Liam Adams and Gabrielle Chenault**  
Nashville Tennessean  
USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

Before a last-minute ceasefire in the U.S. and Israeli war in Iran, members of Nashville's Iranian-American community were doubtful about President Donald Trump's escalatory remarks about U.S. strikes on civilian targets in the country.

"A whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again. I don't want that to happen, but it probably will," Trump wrote on social media on April 7 at 7:00 a.m.. The president's stark warning came hours ahead of an 8 p.m. ET deadline that day for Iran to make a deal or face broad attacks targeting the country's power plants and bridges. That then transformed into a ceasefire the president announced later that night.

See **IRAN WAR**, Page 4A



Community members gather to dance and celebrate Newroz, the Kurdish holiday, with a fire lighting ceremony hosted by members of the Kurdistan Diaspora Center of Nashville at Whitfield Park on March 20. Nashville is home to one of the nation's largest Kurdish immigrant communities.

### INSIDE

FBI warned agencies of Iran's threat to U.S. even as the White House sought to downplay the likelihood of an attack, **Page 3A**

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