

OBITUARIES

Mary Jane Haller, 93

Mary Jane Haller, age 93, passed away peacefully on Friday, Jan. 23, 2026, in Louisville, Ky. Mary Jane was born and raised in Peru, Ind., and was a graduate of Richland Township High School. Following graduation, she relocated to Fort Wayne, Ind., to continue her post-secondary education.

She began her professional career with CIT Corporation before transitioning to People's Trust Bank, where she managed the Installment Loan Department. Mary Jane enjoyed a long and distinguished career in banking and retired in 1991 as an Assistant Vice President. Mary Jane had a deep passion for volunteering and generously supported numerous organizations in both Fort Wayne, Ind. and Louisville, Ky. She served as President of Lutheran Social Services in Fort Wayne and was an active member of The Blessing House, United Way, CASA and PEO. Her faith was central to her life; she was a devoted follower of Jesus Christ and a faithful member of Trinity English Lutheran Church in Fort Wayne and Christ United Methodist Church in Louisville.

She was preceded in



death by her beloved husband, Milton Haller and her stepsons, Mark Haller, Michael Haller (Christine) and Mathew Haller (Kathleen).

Mary Jane is survived by her son, Kevin and daughter-in-law, Katie of La Grange, Ky. She leaves behind a loving legacy, including her grandchildren, Madison Oakey (Jack) of Louisville; Tyler Haller (fiancé Alyssa) of Cincinnati, Ohio; Kimberly Pappas (David) and Lindsay Stafford (James) of Dallas, Texas; Lauren and Anna Haller of Fort Wayne, Ind. and Jon Haller (Alexandra) of Indianapolis, Ind. She is also survived by her great-grandson, Austin Pappas; and her daughters-in-law, Christine Haller of Dallas, Texas and Kathleen Whippo Haller of Fort Wayne, Ind.

The family would like to extend their heartfelt gratitude to the staff and caregivers at Forest Springs Health Campus, especially the Memory Care Unit team, for their love, compassion and comforting care.

Visitation for Mary Jane will be held at Stoess Funeral Home (6534 West Highway 22 | Crestwood, KY 40014) on Saturday, Jan. 31 from 10-11:00 a.m. A memorial service will be held immediately following at Stoess Funeral Home. Burial will be at Greenlawn Memorial Park and Mausoleum, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Charitable donations may be made in her memory to P.E.O. <https://www.peointernational.org/make-a-gift/#donate> or to the Trilogy Health Services Foundation employee scholarship program Trilogy Health Services Foundation, C/O Memorial/Tribute Gifts, 303 N. Hurstbourne Pkwy. Suite 200, Louisville, KY 40222 or online at <https://thetrilogyfoundation.org/memorial-or-tribute-gifts/>.



Karen Beach McLeod, 79

LA GRANGE Karen Beach McLeod, of La Grange, Ky., passed away on Dec. 30, 2025, at the age of 79. Born on Oct. 28, 1946, in Ansonia, Conn.

Karen graduated from high school in 1964 and went on to enroll in the LPN program through Yale New Haven, where she began her journey of caring for others. Her career culminated in her role as a paraeducator for special needs children at Issaquah High School in Washington, where she continued to make a difference in the lives of many.

On June 16, 1973, Karen married the love of her life, Charles "Chuck" McLeod. Together, they built a loving family with their son, Shawn Llewellyn McLeod and daughter, Cori Ann McLeod. Karen was also a cherished grandmother to Abigail "Abby" Hope McLeod.

Karen had a deep appreciation for the beauty of God's creation and was a strong advocate of all animals in nature. She



enjoyed time in her garden and being with her family and dogs. She also had a passion for reading and live theatre, which brought her much joy.

Her most fervent prayer was for everyone to just get along, a sentiment that resonated deeply with her life in the "Be Kind" Capital of Kentucky. Her legacy of kindness and compassion will be fondly remembered by all who knew her.

Karen is survived by her husband, Charles Llewellyn McLeod; her son, Shawn Llewellyn McLeod and his wife Jennifer; her daughter, Cori

Ann McLeod; her granddaughter, Abigail Hope McLeod; and her brother, Dayton D. Holmes. She was preceded in death by her parents, Dayton William Holmes and Isabel May (Dodge) Holmes.

A Celebration of Life for Karen will be held on Saturday, Feb. 21, 2026, at 11 a.m., at Covenant Church, 909 W Jefferson St., La Grange, KY, 40031 with a time of memorial visiting from 10 a.m., until the start of the service. A meal of fellowship will immediately follow the service.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to The Arrow Fund or the Humane Society of Oldham County, reflecting Karen's love for animals.

As we remember Karen, let us think of her when we come across Ecclesiastes 3:1-22, a passage that held special meaning for her.



Rickey G. Hubbard, 73

LA GRANGE Rickey G Hubbard, born on April 1, 1952, in Louisville, Ky., passed away on Jan. 21, 2026, at the age of 73.

Rickey was the beloved son of the late Ernest Ray Hubbard and Gertrude Vivian (Cassady) Hubbard.

He is survived by his devoted wife, Nancee Berling Hubbard; daughter, Nikki Jenkins (Jason); foster sons, Nick Sullivan and Derrick Lyons (Maddie); sister, Vivian Roberts (Harold); brother-in-law, Rick Berling; sister-in-law, Sandy Berling; and honorary son-in-law, Zach Firquin. Rickey cherished his role as a grandfather to Sarah, Aiden and Brynn Jenkins and Rylee and Rubee Firquin and was a beloved uncle to nephews, Tim, Bobby and Jordan Martin, Robert Simmons, Joaquin Johnson, Evan and Drew Berling, Landon Simmons and Jaxon Cooper; and



nieces, Lea and Angelique Martin, Shannon (Jeremy), Felicity, Serenity and Aliayah Hendren, Lallie Gutierrez and Payton Simmons.

Rickey was active in high school, participating in band and playing football, where he earned a spot on the Western Kentucky University Football Team and aspired to go professional until an injury altered his path.

Rickey retired from Ford in Oct. 2024 as a journeyman electrician after 30 years of dedicated service. He was a proud

member of the local UAW 862/KTP and IBEW 369. Prior to that, he worked for International Harvester at the Foundry for 10 years.

Rickey had a deep love for his dogs, horses and farm. He enjoyed capturing daring moments of horse performance through photography. Known for his friendly nature, he never met a stranger and could make friends anywhere, even in line at the grocery store. He was a diehard Harley-Davidson man, embracing his passion for motorcycles.

A service will be held to celebrate the life of Rickey at a later date.

In memory of Rickey memorial donations can be made to Hosparus Health or the Kentucky Equine Adoption Center.



Oldham County mom sues Kentucky child welfare officials

BY DEBORAH YETTER KENTUCKYLANTERN.COM

An Oldham County mother has filed a lawsuit against Kentucky child welfare officials, alleging they violated state open records law by failing to provide records related to child deaths and serious injuries from neglect and abuse.

Jennifer Mortenson, who has 12 children, six of whom are adopted, said she is seeking the records to determine whether there are gaps in Kentucky's system when it comes to protecting children.

While the Cabinet for Health and Family Services has provided thousands of pages of the records, it hasn't fully complied with her request, has missed deadlines set by state law, provided incomplete files and has heavily redacted the material, according to the lawsuit filed Dec. 23 in Franklin Circuit Court.

"I'm not trying to make things difficult but open records are what they are," Mortenson, a longtime child advocate, said in an interview. "You're legally entitled to them."

A Health and Family Services spokeswoman responded that the cabinet is complying with Mortenson's request and continues to do so on a "rolling basis" as it reviews case files for release and redacts some information for privacy reasons.

"Following its commitment to transparency, the cabinet has provided extensive records in response to the open records request and has continually informed the requester of its ongoing review of records and the time needed to complete the review," spokeswoman Beth Fisher said in an email. "At this time the cabinet has provided about 8,800 pages of records with necessary redactions and is reviewing between 12,000 and 14,000 additional records."

As for potential gaps in child protection, Fisher said the cabinet's "top priority is the health and safety of the Kentuckians we serve — especially children — and we remain committed to doing that work transparently and in accordance with our state laws."

Access to some child protection records have been well-established by the courts in recent years. In 2016, after a seven-year legal battle with the Louisville Courier Journal and the Lexington Herald-Leader, the state conceded that files it keeps of child deaths and near fatal-injuries are public records. The cabinet settled the legal battle by agreeing to pay the newspapers nearly \$700,000 in penalties and legal costs.

The Todd County Standard, in a separate case, also won the right to obtain records related to the 2011 death of a child in that county who was fatally beaten after the cabinet placed her in an adoptive home.

The records of the case involving Amy Dye, 9, of Todd County, were particularly damaging. It became a symbol of systemic failures after records the state released showed state social service officials had disregarded repeated abuse allegations from teachers at her school.

NO LONGER CONFIDENTIAL

The cabinet for years had argued all such records were confidential but eventually agreed to abide by court rulings that found that cases in which a child dies or nearly dies from suspected abuse or neglect are subject to open records law. There have been about 200 or more such cases per year in Kentucky over the past several years.

An outside panel that reviews all child deaths or severe injuries from suspected abuse or neglect reported in its most recent annual report that it examined 70 child deaths and 149 near-deaths in the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2023. It reviewed 68



Sarah Ladd/ Kentucky Lantern

A lawsuit against the state seeking records on child deaths and abuse has been assigned to Franklin Circuit Judge Phillip Shepherd, whose previous rulings upheld public access to such records in similar cases brought by Kentucky newspapers.

deaths and 134 near deaths of children the previous year.

Mortenson said she wants more details about how the cabinet identifies and investigates such cases.

Mortenson said she and her husband, Matthew, became foster-adoptive parents in 2016. (Such parents provide temporary care for children with the goal of reuniting them with their parents but are prepared to legally adopt.) She also helps operate Hope's Closet, which provides free children's clothing and other items for foster, adoptive and kinship families.

She serves on the cabinet's Trusted Advisors Council, a panel of individuals who have been involved with the foster adoptive system that recommend changes and identify areas of concern.

Mortenson said she first began requesting records in September 2025 of all child deaths and near-deaths from abuse or neglect for 2024 and the first eight months of 2025 but doesn't believe the cabinet is fully complying.

Mortenson's lawsuit has been assigned to Franklin Circuit Judge Phillip Shepherd, whose previous rulings upheld public access to such records in the cases brought by the newspapers starting in 2009.

Mortenson also has filed a complaint with the Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services outlining her concerns.

'PLAN OF SAFE CARE'

Mortenson said she has become increasingly concerned about several areas where she sees gaps in protection for children and hopes to use the information to encourage lawmakers to strengthen laws.

One such area is how state social services staff oversee cases of newborns exposed to substances such as drugs or alcohol including those born with neonatal abstinence syndrome — in withdrawal from drugs, usually opioids, but often more than one substance.

Federal law requires state child welfare workers to create what's known as a "Plan of Safe Care" for such newborns, meant to ensure the health and safety of the baby and support parents and caregivers.

Yet an outside panel that reviews child abuse deaths and near fatalities in Kentucky last year found in more than a third of the cases it reviewed of infants with neonatal abstinence syndrome, no record of such a plan could be found. The Child Fatality and Near Fatality External Review Panel concluded that was likely an "underestimate"

of newborns without such plans.

Even as cases of infants born exposed to substances or in withdrawal have risen steadily in recent years, its report found the safety plan "is rarely available to most Kentucky families who are in dire need." Such infants are at greater risk for health problems as well as abuse and neglect, the report said.

The panel noted that last year was the second year in a row it has recommended improving the system to provide such safety plans for infants with neonatal abstinence syndrome, noting that they are at risk of health problems as well as injury and death from abuse and neglect.

"Year after year, the panel has documented that these children are at serious risk of maltreatment," the report said.

A state health office that tracks such births found a slight decrease in 2024 in the number of infants born with neonatal abstinence syndrome.

In 2024, there were 741 cases of babies with signs and symptoms of the syndrome versus 792 cases reported in 2023, according to the Kentucky Public Health Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome Reporting Registry 2025 annual report.

Among its recommendations: "Every infant, including those prenatally exposed to drugs or alcohol, should leave the hospital with an appropriate plan of safe care."

But Mortenson said she doesn't believe that's happening, based on records she has collected and reviewed so far.

Her complaint to the federal health agency states that she believes safety plans are only documented in "a small percentage of cases" of newborns with neonatal abstinence syndrome. Her complaint said that appears to result from failure of a health provider to diagnose and report the condition to child welfare authorities as well as the failure of Kentucky Child Protective Services (CPS) to investigate and follow up on all such cases brought to its attention.

CASES 'SCREENED OUT?'

Mortenson also said she's concerned that in many cases of child abuse and neglect, perpetrators are not prosecuted. She's also concerned that Child Protective Services "screens out" too many reports of suspected abuse or neglect as not meriting an investigation, a concern also highlighted by the outside panel in its most recent report.

SEE WELFARE/PAGE A6

CORRECTION

A Letter to the Editor by Stewart Robinson in the Jan. 22 edition of The Oldham Era had a misstatement:

"... electrical power (a rate of energy use or generation) is measured in mega-watts

(MW) and electrical power (the quantity of energy) is measured in mega-watt hours."

The statement should have read as follows:

"... electrical power (a rate of energy use or generation) is

measured in mega-watts (MW) and electrical energy (the quantity of energy) is measured in mega-watt hours."

For a full corrected version, visit oldhamera.com.

OldhamEra.com

The Oldham Era

Your News Since 1876.

105 S. Walnut, La Grange KY 40031

502-222-7183

Publisher: Jane Ashley Pace - publisher@oldhamera.com, 502-222-7184

Editor: Grant Gerstner - editor@oldhamera.com, 502-839-1688

Sports Editor: Wyatt Sparkman - sports@oldhamera.com, 502-219-6338

Advertising Representative: Barbara Duncan - advertising@oldhamera.com, 502-222-7185

Obituaries: obits@oldhamera.com

POSTMASTER: Send corrections to: The Oldham Era, 105 S. Walnut, La Grange KY 40031. Periodicals postage paid at La Grange KY 40031 - USPS 407-700.

Subscription: The Oldham Era is published every Thursday.

Digital only subscription: **\$25.44**

In-county print and digital subscription: **\$50.88**

Out-of-county print and digital subscription: **\$85.00**