

STATEMENT:

Kay Harper Williams, Attorney for the family of Amari Harley

It has been two months since Amari Harley, a three-year-old, drowned after falling into an unsecured septic tank in a Jacksonville park. Today, I filed a lawsuit against two of the City of Jacksonville's contractors—both companies had a duty to maintain the septic tank at Bruce Park.

It is Christmas. Amari should be eagerly anticipating Santa's arrival and his parents should be looking forward to the smile on his face as he opens gifts on Christmas morning. Instead, they have to visit their child at a cemetery and place gifts on his headstone.

In April, 2016 the City of Jacksonville knew that the septic tank lid at Bruce Park was unsafe, because the unsecured lid had been reported to them. Amari died 18 months later because the septic tank lid at Bruce Park was still unsecured. This is gross negligence. Why did the City of Jacksonville decide that safety at Bruce Park wasn't a priority? Amari had to die for the City to make that tank safe for children—in a public park. Since Amari's death, the lid has been changed twice—first, to concrete, and now metal. In less than two months, the City has done what it didn't see fit to do in 18 months, despite complaints.

This gross negligence by the City of Jacksonville demonstrates a disparity in the way attention is given and resources are provided to poorer neighborhoods. As we enter the next election cycle, City leaders need to answer questions about why children are being punished because of their address. If Amari lived in an area that the City cared more about, he would be alive. But he lived in Arlington, so he died. We want answers for Amari's death, and assurances this this will never happen again.

The Mayor claims that there will be accountability, yet, to my knowledge, the companies that were supposed to make the tank safe are still employed by the City. Jacksonville taxpayers are still footing the bill for incompetence. People who approved this contract are still employed and enjoying the holiday season. Where is the accountability? Where is the justice for Amari's grieving family?