

WATCHDOG

Over a year after their daughter's sudden group home death, a NJ couple still want answers

5-minute read

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Key Points

- Katie's death highlighted the prevalence of medication errors in the system and the absence of medical personnel to administer them properly, even for residents with a complex mix of prescriptions.
 - The state and group homes confirmed 1,620 cases of medication errors and medication going missing from 2019 to 2024 across the state system, according to state data.
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It's been more than a year since 21-year-old Katherine "Katie" Moronski died just two days after moving into a group home for adults with developmental disabilities in Sussex County, the result of a [fatal mix of her prescription medications](#), which the staff was responsible for administering.

Yet her parents are still waiting for the results of a state investigation into their daughter's sudden and unexpected death.

There has been no communication from the state office in charge of the probe, the Department of Human Services, since the couple's one video

interview last year.

And investigators never followed up to view the medications returned to Katie's parents after she died, which they said show evidence of tampering.

Story continues below photo gallery.

"I was concerned when the state interviewed us for their investigation. I was concerned that they weren't inquisitive enough or looking at enough sources, or asking the right questions," said [Lynne Moronski](#), Katie's mother, who is a nurse.

"You know, every day we go to the mailbox and we look for a letter," she said. "And I think that's been challenging for us, the uncertainty of it."

Sean Moronski, Katie's father, said he doesn't expect that the report will provide answers, but at the very least hopes it will recognize the need for change.

"It is about Katie, but more so, it's about the most vulnerable people whom the government took a responsibility to help, to house and to further their lives," Sean said.

"They have a responsibility to make the best effort to find out what happened, and so that reduces the possibility of it happening again," he said. "You would think that as an agency, there would be some type of lessons learned, because unfortunately, we can't help Katie now."

[The death of the young woman with autism](#) at a Broadstep group home in June 2024 was detailed in May of this year in the NorthJersey.com series

[Hidden at Home](#), which revealed serious ongoing problems in the \$1.5 billion group home system, overseen by the state Department of Human Services — including a lack of basic care for residents and dozens of [preventable deaths](#).

A state spokesman did not respond to questions from NorthJersey.com about the Moronski investigation. The Department of Human Services has not answered questions from Hidden at Home reporters since mid-May.

Katie's death highlighted the prevalence of medication errors in the system and the absence of medical personnel to administer them properly, even for residents with a complex mix of prescriptions.

Katie's medications numbered about 30, taken at varying intervals throughout the day, some on an as-needed basis.

In addition to being autistic, Katie was bipolar and struggled with depression and obsessive compulsive and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders. She had asthma and nut and dairy allergies.

The state and group homes confirmed 1,620 cases of medication errors and medication going missing from 2019 through 2024 across the state system, according to data obtained by NorthJersey.com through a public records request.

Of those cases, 57 were listed as having a “serious effect,” and another 1,305 a “potentially serious effect.”

Story continues below chart.

The specifics of these cases are unknown because the state does not make incident reports public.

Katie's death also illustrates the state's failure to complete timely and meaningful investigations into resident deaths, a complaint made by both families and providers.

Generally, state investigators took an average of 3½ to six months to complete reports on group home and community provider cases, according to the latest data covering July 2024 through June 2025 obtained by NorthJersey.com through a public records request.

The state handles only the cases it deems the most serious and opened 425 cases during that time frame.

But the outcome is often dissatisfying to families and advocates.

Story continues below chart.

The state may require a group home to submit a plan of correction that details how it will respond to whatever issues investigators found, but those plans are not public, either.

[NorthJersey.com reporting has found](#) that the state rarely uses its powers to punish poorly-performing providers, such as by closing homes, suspending admissions or creating a state panel to increase oversight.

New Jersey does not have the power to fine group home companies.

Cause of death

Katie, an inquisitive young woman, was excited to start a new chapter of her life at the New Jersey group home near her family after seven years at a therapeutic boarding school in Massachusetts.

But she fell ill the morning of her second day there and was taken to urgent care and then to a nearby hospital, where her condition quickly deteriorated.

The medical examiner ruled Katie's death an accident. The cause, according to her autopsy: "Acute intoxication due to Bupropion, Olanzapine, Fluoxetine and Lorazepam."

Story continues below graphic.

The first three drugs were part of Katie's regular medication regimen, which the group home was responsible for dispensing — Katie could not administer her own medication. Records show that the fourth medication listed on the autopsy report, lorazepam, was administered at the hospital in response to a seizure.

Two of the drugs cited by the Morris County Medical Examiner's Office as contributing to Katie's death were prescribed antidepressants; a third was prescribed to treat her bipolar disorder.

At least one of those drugs was in her bloodstream at a concentration in the range where there have been fatal overdoses, a toxicology report shows.

RHA Health Services, which owns Broadstep, did not respond to requests for comment. In a previous statement, a spokesperson wrote, “We are committed to providing high quality services in safe and healthy environments for the people we serve, who are at the center of everything we do.”

The Moronskis have since sued RHA Health Services and several of its employees.

In a lawsuit filing, RHA denied allegations that negligence and recklessness led to Katie’s death.

‘It makes us feel more suspicious’

It took the state until four months after Katie’s death to open an investigation, on Nov. 4, 2024. Her parents were interviewed three weeks later, on Nov. 25, when Lynne Moronski said investigators expressed interest in seeing the medications returned to the family by Broadstep, including pill packs for dates after Katie’s death that had been opened — and resealed with tape.

“It's just so frustrating to me that when we talk to her circle of professionals, they're just shocked that the pill packages were opened,” Lynne Moronski said. “That's just a big no-no, and they're sealed by a pharmacist. So there's really a lack of understanding about why that would happen.”

The half dozen packs of Katie’s bedtime medications were supposed to have seven pills each, but had only five.

And there were 20 olanzapine pills in an envelope stapled to one of the blister packs. The imprint on the loose pills didn't match the pack it was stapled to.

The Moronskis find the state's apparent lack of urgency — and its silence — disheartening and suspicious.

Their only information has come from Paul Aronsohn, the state ombudsman for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities and their families. He made inquiries on their behalf and was told on June 2, 2025, that the report was in the final review and approval process.

More than three months later, in mid-September, Aronsohn received the same answer: The report was still under review.

The Moronskis were never contacted by police or prosecutors, and public records requests submitted last November by NorthJersey.com show no law enforcement records about Katie's death in Sussex County or Newton, where her group home is.

Aronsohn says the family deserves more.

"First, there was a four-month delay to start the investigation. Now, there has been a nearly 16-month delay to conclude the investigation," Aronsohn said. "Clearly, the state of New Jersey needs to revisit the way it conducts investigations of abuse, neglect and deaths.

"Families like the Moronskis deserve a whole lot better," he said.

The Moronskis continue to mourn their inquisitive daughter and the loss of what could have been.

Katie worked hard to overcome the challenges she faced, and pushed herself to improve her behavior and boost her reading and math levels. Her love of horses and her skill in grooming them held the potential for a career, and the Broadstep group home's location in Newton put her near an abundance of horse farms.

“It makes us feel more suspicious the longer it goes, whether that's an accurate interpretation or not,” Lynne said. “It's a feeling. It's a feeling.”