

# Suit charges child agency negligence

Two children were released into the care of their mother, who is charged in their deaths.

By Julia Terruso  
STAFF WRITER

Anthony Singleton lies awake most nights haunted by questions of what he could have done to prevent the death of his infant son and 3-year-old stepdaughter. He searches for signs he might have missed in the behavior of his wife, who is charged with killing them.

"I thought she was all right," Singleton said last week. "This would be the last thing I thought she would do. The very last thing."

Singleton, 59, is suing the child welfare agency Turning Points for Children, a DHS contractor, that facilitated the reunification of his son, St. Leo, and stepdaughter, Ariel, with their mother, Sophia Hines. Hines is charged with smothering the children with a bedsheet in June 2016. She was ruled mentally incompetent to stand trial and is being held in a psychiatric facility in Florida.

The lawsuit, filed Monday, alleges that Turning Points, which was providing services to the family, failed to consult with Department of Human Services psychologists or review Hines' medical information before recommending that the court release the children back into her custody. Hines was on medication for an underlying psychiatric condition and suffering from postpartum depression, according to an agency review of the deaths.

"If they did their job, these kids would be alive today," said attorney Michael Shaffer, who is representing Singleton with his law partner Michael Gaier. "Anthony is not an expert. He's not a psychiatrist. He does not have the ability to evaluate what's appropriate for reunification. That's their job."

The suit alleges negligence and wrongful death, and seeks damages for Singleton on behalf of his son and for four relatives of Hines' on behalf of her daughter.

Turning Points CEO Michael Vogel said Monday he could not comment on pending litigation. A review of the deaths found Hines had not signed consent to enable the agency to obtain her medical records.

"Turning Points for Children is deeply saddened by the tragic deaths of these children last



Lawyer Michael Shaffer comforts Anthony Singleton as he talks about the death of his son and stepdaughter last June in Florida. JESSICA GRIFFIN / Staff Photographer

year," Vogel said. "Our work in caring for and supporting children and families is challenging and complex, and while we cannot comment on open litigation or specific case details, we continue to stay focused on working closely with DHS to ensure the safety of all children and families in our community."

Singleton, a former Marine who works as a traffic flagger, met Hines, who emigrated from Jamaica, in 2015. Hines already had her then-2-year-old daughter, Ariel, whom Singleton called "the smartest little girl in the world."

"I've never seen a kid so young that remembers that much," Singleton said. "She was like a tape recorder. You told her you were going to do something, she remembered."

When Hines got pregnant with St. Leo, something shifted, Singleton said. She moved out of Singleton's home and into a shelter. Ten days after giving birth, she brought both of her children to Einstein Medical Center, saying she was depressed and overwhelmed.

The children were placed in foster care for six months, during which Hines and Singleton reunited and got married at a small ceremony at their home in Frankford. Singleton said that he wanted Hines to know he was fully committed to his new son and stepdaughter, and that he accompanied her to scheduled visits with the kids. Things seemed



Ariel and St. Leo. The Turning Points for Children agency recommended their mother get custody of them without a capacity evaluation.

to be better between them, he said.

"I loved her, and I thought that was the right thing to do," he said. "I learned the hard way that you can't get married for anything other than love."

In April 2016, Turning Points recommended to Family Court that Hines regain custody. It was later revealed in a review of the case that the agency did so without conducting a parenting-capacity evaluation and thus without knowledge of Hines' mental-

health status. The reunification was based in part on a letter from a social work intern who knew Hines for less than a month.

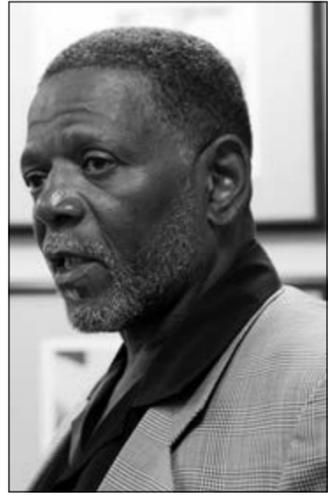
Singleton said that if Hines was exhibiting signs of distress at the time, he missed them. He was working 12-hour days, and the couple were living together off and on.

Shaffer said his case will show the children were returned too soon.

"She tried to do the best she could when she took the kids back to Einstein initially. She told them, 'I'm in over my head here, help me,'" Shaffer said. "Then it's their job to appropriately reunify. I wish I could say they did a bad job. They didn't do anything on the checklist they were supposed to do, and it's very clear reunification never should have happened — she was clearly not ready."

In mid-May, Hines told Singleton she was going to visit her brother in Queens, New York City. Instead, she took the children, via bus, to Miramar, Fla., where she stayed with a cousin. When she didn't answer Singleton's calls, he became alarmed.

On June 9, police responded to Hines' cousin's home and found both children unresponsive, lying side by side on a bed. Hines admitted to killing the children in an interview with police in which she answered few questions and appeared catatonic, ac-



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Anthony Singleton

ording to police reports. The report said Hines had scratches on her face, which indicate Ariel, whom she said she killed second, fought back.

After finding out about his son's death, Singleton flew to Florida to identify the bodies and bring them home.

He said he couldn't work for nearly a year because of the shock. Now he regularly visits a psychiatrist at the Department of Veterans Affairs, and relies on his West Philadelphia church community and the distraction of his job.

He said he hopes the lawsuit promotes more diligence on the part of the agencies charged with protecting children.

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He has spoken with Hines in jail but says it's difficult to talk to her.

"I want to forgive her. I think I need to. Maybe it'll help me get by what I'm going through, but it's just really hard. I can't find the words," he said. "I hope and pray that I do."

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## Untermeyer brings drive, funds to race

UNTERMAYER from B1

I don't want to be owing anybody when I take over this office."

Among seven Democratic candidates who all in some way are focused on reforming the office, Untermeyer argues he has the purest intentions. He said he has no desire to use the post as a stepping-stone to higher office and wasn't lured by the job's six-figure salary.

Rather, he describes himself as a true public servant, a pursuit he said started when at age 18 he worked as an ambulance driver in Harlem. He said the experience is what years later developed into his interest in the District Attorney's Office and helping victims of crime.

"I mean, I, as an 18-year-old, I saw people jumping out of windows. I saw suicides. I saw shootings. I saw homicides. I saw everything at a really young age," he said. "And it had a real impression on me."

After graduating from Rutgers-Camden Law School, Untermeyer spent two years in New York City's law department, then moved to Philadelphia, where he went into private practice and started applying to work at the District Attorney's Office.

Once accepted, Untermeyer volunteered to work in the newly created domestic violence unit, a job he said was challenging and rewarding, given that domestic violence at the time was not fully accepted as a crime by the justice system. He went on to spend more than a decade at the state Attorney General's Office, where he specialized in tracking the money tied to major drug operations.

He has spent much of his time since leaving the Attorney General's Office working in real estate, where he has derived much of his personal wealth, and continuing work in law with a focus on small businesses. Last year, he and a partner purchased the Famous 4th Street

### Michael Untermeyer

Age: 66

Law school: Rutgers-Camden

Neighborhood: Center City

Resumé: Assistant district attorney at the Philadelphia District Attorney's Office (1984-88), senior deputy attorney general at the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office (1990-2001), special counsel at the Pennsylvania Office of Inspector General (2003-04), private practice (2004-present).

Cookie Co. in Reading Terminal Market.

He has also taken to running for office — in 2007 as a Democrat for sheriff, in 2009 as a Republican for district attorney, and in 2011 as a Republican for City Council.

His affiliation-flipping is now ammunition for some of his competitors. Last week, Joe Khan, also a candidate in the primary, started airing a television ad that begins with an image of an elephant carrying an Untermeyer campaign sign as the narrator says Untermeyer "switched parties just to run for DA."

Untermeyer said he registered as a Republican in his first bid only because his father was sick at the time and he missed the deadline to run in the Democratic primary. He said his affiliation in his City Council race was "kind of an afterthought," since his main goal was to promote his ideas.

Some of those ideas have remained consistent between his two runs for district attorney. For example, he wore an electronic ankle monitor during the 2009 race to promote the cheaper alternative to pretrial incarceration, something he still supports. (He linked the monitor to his website and invited voters to track him.) In both races, he also advocated for a more victim-focused model of prosecution, where a single prosecutor

is assigned to a case from start to finish.

Other parts of his platform lack the same consistency. For example, in 2009, Untermeyer's plan for bail reform included returning to the bail-bondsman model, while today he wants to do away with cash bail. And some of his zero-tolerance, tough-on-crime rhetoric from his first campaign stands at odds with his current pitch.

"When I'm DA?" he said during his 2009 bid. "Do the crime, you'll do the time."

Untermeyer sees no inconsistencies in his positions over the years. He said that some of his ideas have evolved as he has studied best practices from around the country but that he has always been focused on reform.

"The system is broken," he said. "I said it then, and I'm saying it now."

Untermeyer, a wonkish guy with an excitable energy when stumping, has outlined his plans for office in great detail, issuing five policy papers totaling 35 pages. They are sprinkled with references to initiatives from district attorney's offices around the country.

He wants to adopt the bail system found in Washington, which in lieu of cash bail uses a risk-assessment tool to determine the likelihood a person will reoffend or fail to show in court, then

### Profiles of DA Candidates

The Inquirer will publish profiles of the Democratic candidates for district attorney on these dates:

Teresa Carr Deni	Monday, May 1
Tariq El-Shabazz	Tuesday, May 2
Joe Khan	Wednesday, May 3
Lawrence Krasner	Thursday, May 4
Rich Negrin	Friday, May 5
Jack O'Neill	Monday, May 8
<b>Michael Untermeyer</b>	<b>Tuesday, May 9</b>

uses pretrial monitoring such as phone or in-person check-ins.

He wants to use Seattle's pre-arrest diversion program for low-level, nonviolent drug cases, which steers defendants to treatment and other support options other than jail.

He wants to increase prosecution of white-collar and corporate crimes, pointing to the \$25 million settlement San Francisco's district attorney reached with Uber. He sees it as a way to help many victims of crime in a single case while using the office's resources more effectively to go after major institutions rather than small cases.

Untermeyer hits that note — going after the "big guys" — often on the campaign trail, saying the office is currently too focused on winning cases rather than seeking justice.

"I believe we have to go after the big guy," he told said at a packed candidate forum held in a Central Philadelphia church last month. "I believe we have to go after the big organization. Narcotics organizations. Corporations that are hurting our community and our city. I think for too long now, our District Attorney's Office has been going after, really, the pursuit of statistics."

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### WHAT TO DO

#### PHILADELPHIA

► **Drexel Writing Festival** 3 days of free writing workshops, presentations, performances & screenings. Drexel University — Leonard Pearlstein Gallery, 3401 Filbert St. Free. 5/9.

► **PCMS Concert: Time for Three** Two violins & bass play eclectic repertoire. Kimmel Center, 300 S. Broad St.; <https://www.pcmsconcerts.org/concerts/time-for-three-2017/>. \$25; \$10 students. 5/9. 8 p.m.

► **Philadelphia Chinese Lantern Festival** Illuminated displays created using traditional Chinese methods, thousands of LED lights, daily performances, craft displays & more. Franklin Square, 6th & Race Sts. \$12-\$17. 5/9.

#### BUCKS COUNTY

► **Sellersville: Iron Butterfly** Rock band best known for their classic "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida." Sellersville Theater 1894, Main St. & Temple Ave. \$33-\$45. 5/10. 8-11 p.m.

► **Doylestown: PNC Presents Broadway Cabaret at the Michener: Eden Espinosa** Broadway star known for her portrayal of Elphaba in "Wicked." James A. Michener Art Museum, 138 S. Pine St.; 215-340-9800. \$450-\$650 series of 3 concerts. 5/11. 8 p.m.

#### DELAWARE COUNTY

► **Haverford: Academy of Vocal Arts Presents Die Zauberflöte** Stage Director Jeffrey Buchman presents his Florida Grand Opera setting of the Mozart opera. Haverford School, 450 Lancaster Ave. 5/9. 7:30 p.m.

#### MONTGOMERY COUNTY

► **Glenside: Whose Live Anyway?** Cast members of "Who's Line Is It Anyway?" present a live improv comedy show. Keswick Theatre, 291 Keswick Ave. [www.whosliveanyway.com](http://www.whosliveanyway.com). \$32-\$52. 5/11. 8 p.m.