



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on December 4, 2014

Home-birthed Children Seized After Parents Refuse to Use Hospital

It perhaps was your grandparents' birthing experience. But this certainly isn't your grandparents' government. A Washington state couple has had their children seized by Child Protective Services, allegedly because they refused to take them to a hospital for a check-up and treat their older child with steroids — for eczema.



Cleave and Erica May Rengo certainly are do-it-yourselfers (Mrs. Rengo is shown with one of her twins). The Bellingham residents eschewed a traditional marriage ceremony and instead, as Cleave put it, “just prayed and invited God to bless our relationship so we'd have a family built on a firm foundation.” Soon afterwards their first child was conceived, and nine months later Erica delivered him at a birth center. But when the new mother found herself pregnant again in short order, the couple returned to their independent ways and decided on home birth. Erica related the reasoning and desires behind this decision: “I've done a lot of research about other women who have done it and they said the spiritual experience was so much more wholesome,” she [told](#) media outlet King5.com. “It was just us. We wanted to preserve that sanctity and sacredness in our birth.”

But the home birth, on October 2, was not without surprises. Having forgone an ultrasound, the Rengos never expected a daughter to be born — on the heels of their second son. They'd had fraternal twins.

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The deliveries themselves, however, were problem-free. The babies were healthy, and Erica “describes her homebirth as ‘exquisite’ and ‘empowering.’ Morna Kai Grace and Daniel Clemente were born into their parents' loving arms,” [wrote](#) Terri LaPoint at MedicalKidnap.com.

But the post-partum period was anything but problem-free, with the couple getting a harsh lesson in how the state has been empowered. It began when paramedics arrived at the Rengos' home after being called by an outside party, possibly a family member worried about the home-birthing. The couple allowed them into their home in deference to the concerned family members, and LaPoint writes about



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what happened next:

Paramedics arrived to find the twins nursing and everybody doing fine. The twins each weighed over 5 lbs, and the paramedics allegedly verified that everyone appeared healthy. The paramedics allegedly recommended that they go to the hospital for evaluation, which is standard procedure for EMTs.

The Rengos say they declined, telling them they didn't want to expose their newborns to the dirty environment of the hospital. They were planning to follow recommendations they had found, which stated that newborn twins should stay home for the first six weeks of life, to give their immune systems the opportunity to build up.

This refusal of hospital care obviously didn't sit well with someone, as CPS was called. A pair of social workers appeared at the couple's residence the next day, asking to see all three children and claiming they were there "to help." But it turned out their definition of "help" was bit different than the Rengos'.

One of the social workers found some eczema on the skin of the couple's eldest child, 10-month-old Levi. The *Washington Times* [reported](#) on what transpired next:

CPS then suggested the couple treat the older child's eczema with steroid-based creams, rather than the probiotics, coconut oils and natural remedies they were already using. But the parents said no.

"It's a very harsh treatment and can have very negative side effects," [Mrs. Rengo] said, King 5-TV reported. "It can cause damage to bones, the muscular system and liver."

And dad weighed in: "They wanted the authority in my household. I told them, 'I'm a Christian and God gave me the authority in my household,'" Mr. Rengo said, King 5-TV reported.

It was soon after that discussion that CPS removed all three children from the home.

There certainly have been other cases, many high profile, in which children were seized from parents who refused them medical treatment. But these have invariably involved serious illnesses such as cancer. In contrast, eczema is a benign skin condition that can be itchy but is far from life-threatening. I once had it myself, concluded stress was the cause, and it disappeared over time without treatment. And it is certainly understandable that the Rengos wouldn't want to use steroidal medication on a baby with nothing but a nuisance rash.

More outrageous still, say critics, that rash was the only problem CPS could cite. LaPoint reports that the children were found to be healthy and safe, their home was hygienic, and the Rengos had no substance abuse problems. Moreover, the couple had already taken the twins to a pediatrician, who gave them a clean bill of health. And while they were having a problem gaining weight — likely caused by Erica's difficulty breastfeeding three babies — this problem was remedied when she supplemented the children's diet with formula, as per the doctor's recommendation. Despite this, a CPS agent would later testify before a judge that the Rengos were guilty of neglect in refusing to treat the older boy's eczema completely.

And then the fateful day came. On November 6, CPS agents knocked on the Rengos' door. They said they were there to take the couple's children. LaPoint writes about what then ensued:

With one baby on her back, the frightened mother fled out the back door with her children to a neighbor's house, but police and CPS "hunted her down," and took these breastfed babies from their mothers' arms. The twins were 5 weeks old.



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Erica broke down into sobs as I spoke with her. “My children were safe and healthy with me.” Since they have been taken by CPS, Levi has reportedly had pneumonia, and has reportedly been diagnosed with “behavioral problems” because he screams and cries all the time.

He is screaming, Erica says, because he wants his mom and dad.

And in the state’s care these poor children remain to this day, even though the Rengos have been charged with no crime. As King5 writes, “In a petition filed Tuesday,” the couple’s attorney, Stephen Pidgeon, “calls the seizure of the children ‘unlawful, unconscionable, and inexcusable.’ Though there were calls to the home about domestic issues prior to the children’s birth, the petition claims no evidence of ‘clear and present danger,’ rather that CPS is trying to impose their standards of ‘proper parenting.’”

And many find this conclusion inescapable. The Rengos certainly are quirky, and home birth is not without risks. While I personally know a woman who delivered her babies at home without incident with a midwife’s aid, I’m also close to two OB/GYNs who would point out that in the rare cases when there are serious complications, recourse to state-of-the-art medical care and equipment can mean the difference between life and death. But do we want the state to become arbiter of these matters? Home-birth is the historical norm, after all.

Some would also mention the tremendous hypocrisy here. If Erica Rengo had decided to kill her babies in the womb, the decision would have been defended as her “right” and wouldn’t have made news. But if a woman decides to bring a baby to term, the very same abortion advocates will say that she may not refuse him standard medical care or transport him without a child seat; they even generally insist that she mustn’t spank him. In other words, you may kill your child when he’s in one location. When he’s in another, you may not even risk his life or cause him pain in the slightest.

Of course, the pain caused when CPS rips children away from their parents appears of no concern to CPS. We can only hope that the Rengo babies are in better hands than the hapless eight-year-old boy who was cruelly told by a doctor working hand-in-glove with CPS, in a [different case](#) LaPoint brought to light, “If I have it my way, you’ll never see your mommy and daddy again.”



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