

Family and friends gather to remember child killed in Wilmington house fire

[Josephine Peterson](#), The News Journal

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Mourners gathered at the site of Sunday's fatal fire in Wilmington in an impromptu memorial for 11-month-old Maurice "MJ" Williams Jr. William Bretzger/The News Journal



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(Photo: William Bretzger, The News Journal)

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Mourners congregated Wednesday with white balloons and lit candles outside a Wilmington house still roped off with crime tape, and debris still cluttered the lawn.

A [house fire](#) left the home charred and boarded up, and the family with two fewer members.

An 11-month-old boy and his grandmother, 59, died following the Sunday house fire in the 400 block W. 23rd St.

The [blaze](#) quickly engulfed both stories of the house. The fire trapped three family members upstairs, and a teenager had to jump through a window to safety. Investigators said there were no functioning smoke detectors inside the house.

Maurice "MJ" Williams Jr., the infant, was pronounced dead at Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Rockland.

Mourners gather at fatal fire scene



William Bretzger, The News Journal

Nearly 30 people came together to celebrate MJ on a cloudy, rainy afternoon. One after another came up to family members to give condolences and long embraces.

One family friend said in a tragedy like this, there was nothing anyone could do.

"I don't know what to say. There is nothing you can do but be there for them," he said.

Grievers largely remained silent as they waited for candles to be lit and friends to spell "MJ" in tealight candles. The pastor said a prayer for the mourning family and MJ, while bowed heads hung. Everyone walked across the street to release the balloons after a count of three.

The white balloons floated up and drifted off into the gray sky as they looked on.

"I just hope they get to MJ," his uncle, Ellewood Brown, said. "These are hard times for the whole family. I don't think it's really sunk in yet for us."

MJ's other grandmother, Joanne Hawkes, who lives in Philadelphia, said when she first heard the about the fire, she thought it was a joke. Even after the balloon release, the family is staggering with the loss and she said it still doesn't feel real.



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Wax drips from a candle held by a mourner at a gathering late Wednesday afternoon at the scene of a fatal fire at Concord and West 23rd streets in Wilmington. (Photo: William Bretzger, *The News Journal*)

It seems like it's all a game. It doesn't seem like this is what is really going on, but it is," Hawkes said. "He was too young of a baby to deserve this."

She began to break down as she described MJ.

"He was such a happy, joyful baby, who loved everybody," Hawkes said. "I just can't believe this. I lost a son, and now to lose my grandchild, it's really devastating."

Hawkes said the family is overwhelmed.

"They lost everything in the fire. They've got nowhere to go. They have no clothes on their back, on top of losing their child and her mom," she said. "This tragedy took everything."

Shortly before friends and family gathered for MJ, it was announced that his grandmother [Fay Hyland](#) had died.

Hyland was initially taken to Christiana Hospital with burns to 70 percent of her body. She was later transferred to the Pennsylvania Crozer-Chester Medical Center's burn unit, where she was pronounced dead.

Hawkes said Hyland gave her life to save one of the children's lives.

"She is a hero," Hawkes said. "They found her body was covering Isaac, and if she hadn't have done that, he would probably been gone as well."

Isaac Williams, 3 weeks old, was transferred to St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in Philadelphia. He is in critical but stable condition.

Hawkes said he is expected to stay in the hospital for three months.

The grandmother said the family is asking for prayers, but ultimately nothing can bring the two back.

"I'm at a loss for words at this situation," she said.

To help offset the costs, the family has created a [GoFundMe](#) account. There will be an additional balloon release and vigil for Hyland.

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