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Daycare Owner Sentenced to 80 Years in Prison and \$10,000 Fine for Fatal Fire

A jury took just over seven hours to decide the fate of a daycare owner who was convicted of murder after a fire killed four children in her care and seriously injured three others. Jessica Tata was sentenced to 80 years in prison and a \$10,000 fine for the February 2011 offense. Tata left the infants and toddlers home alone while she shopped at a local Target store. The blaze broke out when a pot of boiling oil left on the stove ignited. By the time Tata arrived back home, the house was engulfed in flames.

Statement by Assistant District Attorneys Steve Baldassano and Connie Spence

We appreciate the jurors' service. This trial required that they see, hear and weigh traumatic evidence—and while difficult, they persevered. Our community is grateful to them all.

Our thoughts and prayers today are with the Castillo, Kojah, Stradford and Dickerson families, as well as the other victims who were injured in this terrible crime.

We would also like to express sincere appreciation for the firefighters who responded to the scene and rescued as many children as possible, members of the Houston Arson Bureau, particularly Ruben Hernandez, Dorian Green, and Buddy Wood, also Dave Reiter, Susan Lahmeyer, and Paul Williams. Their contributions were invaluable.

Statement by District Attorney Pat Lykos

I thank the jury for their service in this case. It has been an arduous trial.

No verdict can alter the tragic fact that four families will sit down this Thanksgiving absent precious children who should be in their midst.

I deeply appreciate the legal skills, sensitivity and compassion of Assistant District Attorneys Baldassano and Spence.

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