

# 19-month-old homicide victim known as ‘Baby Angel’ identified nearly 50 years later

Once only known as “Baby Angel,” Hamilton County Coroner Dr. Lakshmi Sammarco identified the 19-month-old victim as **Velina Jeter**. (Source: WXIX)

By [Jared Goffinet](#), [Brenda Ordonez](#) and [Gray News staff](#)

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CINCINNATI (WXIX/Gray News) - An Ohio homicide victim has been identified decades later.

Once only known as “Baby Angel,” Hamilton County Coroner Dr. Lakshmi Sammarco identified the 19-month-old victim as Velina Jeter.

Jeter was born in Columbus on June 10, 1977. Her charred body was found in a field on Eiler Lane on Feb. 4, 1979, Sammarco said.

It was determined she had died from head trauma, Sammarco said.

“How did she get here?” Sammarco said. “How did she become a victim of homicide?” Sammarco said.

Officials said Friday that the infant’s body was exhumed in 2008.

Twelve years later, in 2020, the FBI began teaching Cincinnati police detectives genealogy techniques for cold cases.

In 2021, those tools were applied to the “Baby Angel” case.

Detectives built a genetic family tree of more than 5,200 people, which helped identify the infant.

One official said the turning point came in the summer of 2025, when the community helped track down people believed to be close family members of the little girl. Law enforcement reached out to them, which led to the eventual identification of Jeter.

“One of the most important things throughout this process for us was to give this child a proper headstone... to be buried with her proper name. And through this process, we were able to do that,” Cincinnati Police Specialist Jeff Smallwood said.

Sammarco said Jeter’s parents, Sharon Jeter and Barry Lee Valentine, are dead, but she does have family members still living in Columbus.

An official said there is no reason to think the parents are suspects in Jeter's death at this time, but authorities said they have persons of interest in the case.