

Who is to blame?

State DCYF official won't deny agency knew about abuse

By KIMBERLY HOUGHTON
Democrat Staff Writer

ROCHESTER — An official at the Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Children, Youth and Families stated Friday that the agency is involved in the investigation of a local toddler's death, but would not state if it was contacted prior to her death.

"It is obvious that the death is a tragedy, and the circumstances make it even more difficult," said John Wallace, associate commissioner of the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services.

Wallace would not state when or why the Division of Children, Youth and Families became involved in the manslaughter case, which moved forward Thursday with the arrest of Chad E. Evans, 29, of 191 Milton Road. Evans was living with his girlfriend, Amanda Bortner, 18, and her 21-month-old daughter, Cassidy, at the time of the toddler's death.

Cassidy Bortner died Nov. 9 as a result of blunt force injury to her head, according to a preliminary autopsy report. Evans has been charged with recklessly causing Cassidy's death, but details of how the injury occurred has not been released by authorities.

When asked if the Division of Children, Youth and Families was contacted prior to Cassidy's death about allegations of abuse against the little girl, Wallace said he was not prepared to answer that question.

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COURTESY PHOTO
CASSIDY BORTNER died Nov. 9 as a result of blunt force injury to her head, according to a preliminary autopsy report.

Authorities look deeper for answers

By TERESA ROBINSON
Rochester Bureau Chief

ROCHESTER — While one man sits behind bars in connection with the beating death of a 21-month-old local girl, authorities are looking at other people who might be responsible.

The mother, Amanda Bortner, 18, has not been charged in connection with the incident.

Her boyfriend, however, Chad E. Evans, 29, is charged with manslaughter in connection with Cassidy Bortner's death. He was arraigned Friday in Rochester District Court and is being held without bail at the Strafford County Jail.

Evans and Bortner lived together at 191 Milton Road at the time of Cassidy's death. Bortner has since moved from the residence.

Preliminary autopsy results indicate the girl died as a result of blunt force injury to the head, according to a release from the New Hampshire attorney general.

Evans is charged with manslaughter for "recklessly causing Cassidy's death by inflicting blunt trauma," the attorney general said.

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Family prepares for funeral as suspect faces charges

By JENNIFER L. SAUNDERS
Democrat Staff Writer

ROCHESTER — As the family of 21-month-old Cassidy Bortner gathers in Maine to prepare for her funeral, the man accused of beating her to death is being held without bail.

In a photograph given to Foster's Daily Democrat by a relative, the toddler smiles out at the world, her blue eyes full of hope.

In reality, however, authorities are painting a picture of senseless abuse, which culminated in the death of an innocent, helpless child.

Police have charged 29-year-old Chad E. Evans of 191 Milton Road — the boyfriend of Cassidy's mother — with manslaughter. Police allege the child's death Nov. 9 at York Hospital in York, Maine, was the direct result of abuse inflicted by Evans. While the Maine state medical examiner has not released an official cause of death, the New Hampshire attorney general's office has said the preliminary autopsy results indicate the little girl died from blunt force injury to her head.



CHAD EVANS

"She was extremely young and she was defenseless," New Hampshire Assistant Attorney General Christopher Carter said of little Cassidy. "It defies any reason."

The investigation is continuing, and based on that fact and the effort to ensure Evans has a fair trial, few specific details about the case could be released, Carter said.

As of Friday, the mother, Amanda Bortner, 18, who lived with Evans at the Milton Road residence, had not been

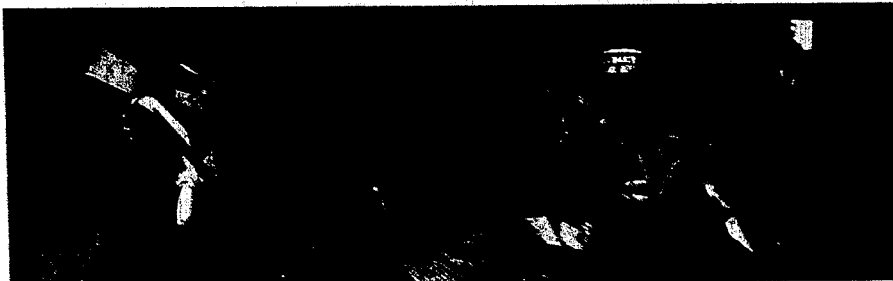
charged with any crime in connection with her daughter's death. Carter and Maine State Police Sgt. Matthew Stewart, one of the primary investigators of this case that has spanned both states, would not comment whether Bortner was present on Nov. 8 and Nov. 9, the dates Evans allegedly inflicted the fatal injuries on her child.

Stewart did say, however, that the investigation is continuing in both Maine and New Hampshire.

"We are working to piece together the

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Six injured in collision



Students target of Web site threats

Somersworth High troubled by content of Internet chat room

By ANDREW MORSE
Somersworth Bureau Chief

and they will try to piece together Cassidy's life, concentrating on the last few days.

Other allegations of abuse will also be pursued, they said.

"This investigation will continue on both sides of the border," Maine State Police Sgt. Matthew Stewart said at a press conference after Evans' arraignment Friday. The investigation to date, he said, "has led this team effort to believe the

law enforcement agencies in both Maine and New Hampshire, including the New Hampshire attorney general, both New Hampshire and Maine state police, Kittery, Maine, police and Rochester police.

"All police agencies in Maine and New Hampshire are committed to ensuring that the case is resolved appropriately," Carter said.

Authorities would not comment on the investigation or confirm

that "any other person having reason to suspect that a child has been abused or neglected shall report the same."

Someone violating the law could be charged with a misdemeanor, according to another section of the Child Protection Act.

Democrat staff writers Kimberly Houghton and Jennifer L. Saunders contributed to this story.

Agency's involvement

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He did say, however, that he would not confirm or deny that the agency was notified before Cassidy's death last week at a Kittery, Maine residence.

"We have some connection with the family," Wallace said. "It is obvious we have some connection with the people involved in this case, but we are reviewing all of the circumstances."

At the request of the Division of Children, Youth and Families,

Evans' ex-wife, Tristan Evans of Dover, filed a request Wednesday for an emergency restraining order between Chad Evans and their 3-year-old son.

The request was made at the Strafford County Superior Court and denied by Judge Peter Fauver.

Although the request was denied, Fauver gave the mother sole custody of her son, allowing only supervised visitation by

Evans, who is now being held at the Strafford County Jail without bail. The two parents previously had joint custody of the boy prior to Wednesday's court order.

Wallace would not explain why the Division of Children, Youth and Families recommended that Tristan Evans file the emergency no-contact order between her son and his father.

"I am not in a position to comment on that," Wallace said.

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details of Cassidy Bortner's life in the days, weeks and months leading up to her death," Carter said Friday. "We are seeking some measure of justice in this utterly senseless act."

"Right now we're focusing on Cassidy," said F. Jeffrey Marshall of Rogers Road in Kittery, who lives with Cassidy's aunt, Jennifer Conley. He said he has his opinions on the case, but does not want to comment at this time. He said he is joining other family members in focusing on Cassidy's private funeral, scheduled for this morning at an undisclosed location. He said he wants to let the courts do their job, and his primary concern is in saying goodbye to the little girl.

Conley and Marshall periodically took care of Cassidy at their Kittery home while her mother worked,

according to police. Marshall, who was the man who called Kittery police seeking emergency medical services on Nov. 9, was the last family member to see the child alive. Officials have indicated Cassidy was brought to the Kittery residence on the morning of Nov. 9 and that Marshall called police that afternoon when the little girl's health took a "dramatic decline." She was pronounced dead at York Hospital at approximately 1:30 p.m.

Carter noted the charge against Evans is the result of "an intensive, coordinated investigation" by Maine and New Hampshire law enforcement authorities including Kittery, Rochester and state police. The decision to bring charges in New Hampshire is based on evidence related to the cause, nature and timing of the little girl's fatal

injuries, he said.

During the arraignment in Rochester District Court on Friday morning, Evans sat with his lawyer on the left side of the courtroom. Conley and Marshall were also in court. Later in the day, Marshall said they felt they had to be there for Cassidy.

The child's mother was not present for the proceedings.

Judge Franklin Jones ordered Evans detained until a probable cause hearing on the manslaughter charge is held Wednesday afternoon at Rochester District Court. He told the state it had 72 hours to file a violation of probation charge, based on the state's allegations Evans' arrest violates his current 365-day probation for a domestic assault conviction last March.

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On a day pitted with emotional highs and lows for both campaigns, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta rejected Bush's request to halt the recounts, returning the matter to Florida courts.

As aides watched glumly from Texas, Bush adviser James A. Baker III said neither court has yet to address the core of the Bush's case — that hand counts from selected counties are unfair and expose the election to mistakes and political mischief. "We remain confident ... the supreme court will find the secretary of state properly exercised her discretion" in barring manual recounts, he said.

Republican operatives were in each of Florida's 67 counties in case a statewide manual recount was ordered either by the courts or — as

request to halt the county recounts, the circuit court in Atlanta said. "States have the primary authority to determine the manner of appointing presidential electors and to resolve most controversies concerning the appointment of electors."

There was no end to the wrangling.

"There are more attorneys than there are ballots," said Bob Edwards, chairman of the Republican Executive Committee for Walton County, where five absentee votes were tossed out, including those of four people who had already voted. In Orange County, officials discarded 117 of 147 votes received.

Democrats protested a number of ballots, saying they were not post-marked as required. A GOP official said Republicans might challenge the discarding of hundreds of ballots, many from military personnel.

Gore's presidential dreams rested with the courts and in the ballot-counting rooms of Palm Beach and

new controversy regarding missing postmarks and a federal court ruling.

The deep partisan divide, certain to shadow the winner to the White House, was evident in the political makeup of Friday's key players: Harris is a Republican who campaigned for Bush, and all seven state Supreme Court justices are appointees of Democratic governors.

"It's very bitter and highly partisan, and it's really a tragedy," said former President Carter, a Democrat who has overseen numerous elections in fledgling democracies since leaving the White House.

Another former president seemed equally philosophical.

"There is a lesson in this and I would simply say that I think this country is totally resilient, totally strong," said George Bush, father of the GOP candidate. "Leaving out who wins or loses, this country will be just fine."

Evans Friday afternoon at the Rochester District Court. The order states that Evans violated his probation conditions when he was arrested in connection with Cassidy Bortner's death.

Evans has been on a one-year probation since March, when he pleaded guilty to a simple assault charge involving his former wife, according to Kevin T. Callaghan, probation and parole officer for the state. During Evans' arraignment on the manslaughter charge Friday morning, defense counsel Alan Cronheim stated Evans could not be considered in violation of his probation simply because he was arrested. Carter countered that police located boxes of live ammunition at Evans' Rochester residence during a search of the premises. Conditions of probation

included not being arrested and not possessing firearms, he noted.

"I will be of good conduct, obey all laws and be arrest free," Evans wrote in court documents at the time his probation began last spring.

Cronheim stated Evans' former wife was present in the courtroom to lend her support to Evans regarding his assertion he is innocent of the manslaughter charge.

"We're not aware of any basis whatsoever for that allegation," Carter said after the proceedings.

Since Evans was arrested Thursday night on the manslaughter charge, he has been held without bail at the Strafford County Jail on a probation detention order, according to court documents.

"(Evans) is responsible for the death of Cassidy Bortner, 21

months," the order states.

In addition to the violation report that was filed, a detention order was also submitted at the Rochester District Court on Friday. A hearing was requested at the court's earliest convenience regarding Evans' bail; however, a date has not been scheduled.

The New Hampshire State Police major crimes unit executed a search warrant at Evans' home on Nov. 10, one day after Cassidy's death, according to court documents.

A spokeswoman for the Maine state medical examiner's office said late Friday that the results of the child's autopsy are still pending further analysis.

Democrat staff writer Kimberly Houghton contributed to this report.

Authorities said the investigation into the toddler's death is not over, and they will try to piece together Cassidy's life, concentrating on the last few days.

Other allegations of abuse will also be pursued, they said.

"This investigation will continue on both sides of the border," Maine State Police Sgt. Matthew Stewart said at a press conference after Evans' arraignment Friday. The investigation to date, he said, "has led this team effort to believe the

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The investigation involves many law enforcement agencies in both Maine and New Hampshire, including the New Hampshire attorney general, both New Hampshire and Maine state police, Kittery, Maine, police and Rochester police.

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the status quo" while lawyers made their challenges in the state that will settle the race for the presidency. Harris was told not to act "until further order."

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