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**RABBITS AT THE ANIMAL SHELTER** — Julie LeBeau, a volunteer at the Stratham Society for the Protection from Cruelty to Animals (left) takes a picture to document an injury to this rabbit, held by Jen Corbin at the SPCA shelter in Stratham Tuesday evening.

bits had food, they had water and they had shelter. They (the Allens) are nice people. It just got out of control and they needed help."

Gagne said he knew the Allens had a lot of rabbits, but was not aware of how many rabbits until recently. He had been over to the

property earlier this year to inform the Allens they must keep their rabbit housing facilities much cleaner.

"Last Thursday, we got a call from a lady whose grandmother

☆ **Taking in rabbits**

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and that left open the chance that the nation might be heading for political Armageddon.

Republicans reacted with fury to the decision and showed no sign of even preparing to give up. Having spent eight years in the political wilderness under President Clinton, they came close to saying that Gore was being given legal sanction to steal the election. Sen. Orrin G. Hatch, R-Utah, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, decried what he called "constitutional errors of great proportions;" the court, he said, has found a way "to give the

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# One toll-free phone call could have saved Kassidy

## Public urged to report suspicions of abuse

By JENNIFER L. SAUNDERS  
Democrat Staff Writer

YORK, Maine — On Nov. 9, a blue-eyed toddler whose greatest concern should have been learning new words died from what officials have deemed "senseless" abuse.

It is too late for 21-month-old Kassidy Bortner, and what makes her death even more tragic are allegations she suffered ongoing abuse — abuse that people knew was happening.

Police have charged Kassidy's mother's live-in boyfriend, 29-year-old Chad E. Evans of 191 Milton Road in Rochester, N.H., with manslaughter, alleging he recklessly caused the child's death by inflicting "blunt injury to her head." In the almost two weeks since Kassidy's death, friends and family members of the child's mother, 18-year-old Amanda



KASSIDY BORTNER

Bortner, have stated they knew or suspected the child was being abused in the weeks and months leading up to her death. Like many who suspect abuse, however, they said they did not report it.

According to state officials in Maine and New Hampshire, all it takes is a toll-free phone call to report suspicions of child abuse and neglect. They say that an anonymous or confidential phone call could save a child

from untold suffering and — as in Kassidy's case — death.

"Every night in Maine, there are children going to bed who have been physically, sexually and/or emotionally abused — and they're going to experience more tonight," said Sandra

☆ **Toll-free phone call**

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### Warning to shoppers

## N.H. group says stay away from

By DAN TUOHY  
N.H. Statehouse Writer

CONCORD — The Pooh "squeakie play-book" was so cute Meg Kelly almost bought it for her 1-year-old nephew.

Then she discovered it contained toxic chemicals. The chemicals known as phthalates are added to polyvinyl chloride plas-

approaches Friday, because such hazardous store shelves state Kelly, a spokeswoman for the Hampshire Public Group.

The consumer advisory group's annual report on "Trouble in Toyland"

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# Toll-free phone call

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Hodge, director of the Maine Department of Human Services' Division of Child Welfare.

Across the nation, Hodge said, people are in denial about child abuse. And, she cautioned, many people accept or ignore behaviors such as belittling, slapping, shoving and degrading children when the treatment comes at the hands of a parent or household member.

"One of the things people have to do is recognize this exists. We are very reluctant to confront how pervasive child abuse really is," Hodge said. "The cases of child death and serious injury aren't going away. They aren't decreasing. I wish they were, but they aren't."

In Maine, Hodge explained, every individual who comes into contact with a child on a professional basis is required to report suspicions of abuse — from day care providers to doctors to teachers, and everyone in between.

"The word is suspected abuse," Hodge said. "They don't have to believe it, they don't have to know it — but if they suspect it, they have to report it. Immediately."

Anyone else is asked to report abuse, but are not required by law to do so. Hodge said mandatory reporters receive training in what to look for, but a majority of child abuse and neglect reports the state receives come from concerned family, friends and neighbors.

"From an ethical and moral perspective, there is no question that anyone suspecting abuse or neglect should report it," she said.

In New Hampshire, the mandatory reporting law extends beyond those with professional contact to include anyone who comes in contact with a child and suspects abuse, explained Nancy Rollins, director of

the state's Department of Health and Human Services Division of Children, Youth and Families. According to New Hampshire statute, anyone who does not report suspicions of child abuse could be brought up on civil charges. Officials have said, however, that penalties are rarely invoked.

As calls come in to the central intake number, Rollins explained, the trained staff works to gather as much information as possible about the child in question and the suspicions of abuse or neglect to make an assessment of the risk involved.

In both Maine and New Hampshire, anonymity of the caller is respected if it is the caller's wish. However, an individual who is willing to leave their name and contact information is more helpful because the state agency is able to follow up with them and gather additional information if need be. In both states, even in cases where names are provided to the agency, the reporter's identity will be kept confidential.

Parents or guardians who have been reported for abuse or neglect may guess identity of a reporter, both directors said.

"When a call comes in that notifies us of suspicions of sexual and physical abuse, we are required under state statute to contact law enforcement," Rollins said, noting state and local police work with New Hampshire's Division of Children, Youth and Families on investigations regularly.

In Maine, Hodge said, state child protection workers also cooperate with police and prosecution in any cases that cross into the criminal realm.

As tragic as the death of a child is, Hodge noted what it makes it even

more is the fact that in many child abuse deaths, family or friends were aware of the abuse but did not take action to stop it.

"I see it over and over and over again, both in child death and serious injury cases," Hodge said softly. "People knew ... but they think the children can get over it."

Hodge noted family, friends and neighbors suspecting child abuse or neglect can attempt to intervene on their own, if the situation seems to be one of a parent who simply needs a little help coping or caring for their child. However, she stressed, if that assistance is offered and is not accepted — or if it makes no difference in the treatment of the child — the next step is to call for help.

"The overwhelming amount of parents who are caught up in this don't want to be there, but they can't stop on their own," Hodge said of the cycle of abuse. She said state agencies can offer intervention in ways that include educating parents on the difference between discipline and abuse and on anger management. Although the state does not seek to take children from their parents, Hodge said she will not hesitate to make such a recommendation if the child's life, health and welfare are being endangered in the home. The safety of the children has to come first, Hodge said.

"I would certainly encourage people — if they feel a child is being abused or neglected, call the intake number," Rollins said.

In New Hampshire, the Division of Children, Youth and Families can be reached by calling the in-state toll-free number at (800) 894-5533 or (603) 271-6563. In Maine, the Division of Child Welfare can be reached 24 hours a day, seven days a week at (800) 452-1999.

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