

Thursday, April 18, 2002

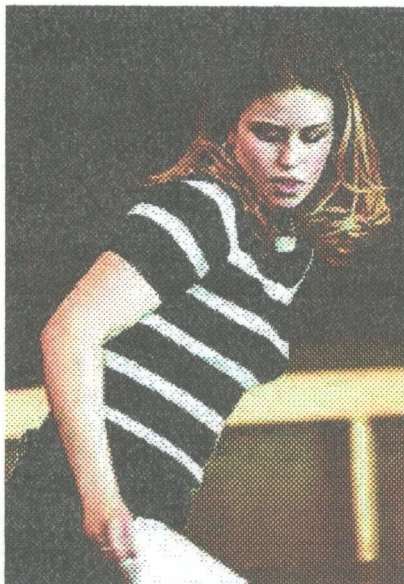


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## Bortner may skip trial: Considers guilty plea

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Amanda Bortner attended the sentencing Tuesday of her boyfriend, Chad Evans, who was earlier convicted in the beating death of her 21-month-old daughter, Cassidy. (Steve Drozell/Staff photographer)

DOVER — Although the state is not offering her a deal, the mother of a toddler murdered in November 2000 may avoid a trial by pleading guilty to misdemeanor charges pending against her.

Amanda Bortner was charged with two counts of endangering the welfare of a child in November 2001 — almost exactly one year after her boyfriend, 30-year-old Chad E. Evans of Rochester, beat her daughter to death.

Evans was convicted in December of second-degree murder and multiple counts of assault in connection with the death of 21-month-old Cassidy Caitlyn Bortner. He was sentenced Tuesday in Strafford County Superior Court to a term of 28 years to life in prison on the second-degree murder charge, and several suspended sentences on the assault convictions.

Evans and Bortner, 20, lived together with Cassidy at his 191 Milton Road residence for about three months before the toddler's death on Nov. 9, 2000.

In a March letter to Judge Tina L. Nadeau, Assistant Attorney General David W. Ruoff referenced communication from Bortner's court-appointed attorney that indicated "Ms. Bortner is apparently agreeing to proceed with a naked plea to the two pending misdemeanor charges."

Based on that communication, Ruoff said both he and Bortner's attorney, Patricia Wiberg, were requesting a presentencing investigation on Bortner be authorized by the court. Nadeau

In an interview Wednesday morning, Ruoff explained that a "naked plea" is essentially a plea for which the state has offered a defendant no negotiated agreement.

"We don't have any kind of deal with her at all ... I'm anticipating a trial," Ruoff said.

Bortner, whose last-known address is Endicott Road in Weirs Beach, could not be reached for comment on the case. A message at her phone number states it has been disconnected and no further information is available.

According to testimony in Evans' trial, he repeatedly abused Kassidy by grabbing her face, picking her up by the neck, slapping her and throwing her against the walls of the house. Prosecutors also maintained he held Kassidy's face under running water and grabbed her by the arms and legs.

Bortner's testimony in the trial was compelled by the state. Although she told police she witnessed Evans' abuse of her daughter on multiple occasions, she backed away from some of those statements under oath.

She testified Evans did grab Kassidy's face with enough force to leave bruises on several occasions. She also stated he would "roughly place" Kassidy in the corner and that the toddler hit her head against the door. Bortner said she never thought Evans' treatment of the child hurt her.

She described Kassidy as jealous whenever Evans and Bortner were affectionate and said it frustrated Evans.

Bortner faces two misdemeanor counts of endangering the welfare of a child, one alleging failure to protect Kassidy from Evans' abuse in the weeks before her death .

The second charge cites Bortner's conduct on the night before Kassidy died and the morning of the child's death.

On the morning Kassidy died, Bortner drove the child from Rochester to the Kittery, Maine, home of her sister, Jennifer Bortner-Conley. While Bortner and her sister left for work, Kassidy was left in the care of Bortner-Conley's boyfriend, F. Jefferey Marshall.

Both he and Bortner-Conley testified they had witnessed bruises on Kassidy in the past, but believed the stories Bortner and Evans provided to explain the bruises.



Kassidy Bortner

At Evans' sentencing, Bortner stated she misses her child and criticized her family for not caring about Cassidy until she was gone. She then asked the judge to be lenient on Evans, praising him as a father and describing him as a "wonderful man."

Ruoff said Bortner faces a maximum term of one year in jail on each of the misdemeanor counts of endangering the welfare of a child.

Jury selection for Bortner's trial is scheduled to begin June 10 at Strafford County Superior Court.