

Child advocates laud state for abuse policy

High-profile crime led to disclosure law

By **NORMA LOVE**
The Associated Press

Eight years ago, 21-month-old Cassidy Bortner of Concord died after being beaten horrifically - including being thrown into a closet door - by her mother's boyfriend, Chad Evans.

Evans and the mother went to prison. He was convicted of second-degree murder, she of child endangerment.

Four years after the toddler's death, lawmakers passed the "Bortner Law," which requires the state to disclose what it knew about fatal or near-fatal child abuse cases in which state agencies had some oversight over the family.

The state can withhold the information for reasons including protecting siblings, but it must explain itself in writing.

Supporters hoped it would prevent future tragedies.

Today, two leading child advocacy groups, First Star and the University of San Diego



Evans

traceable directly to Cassidy Bortner's death.

The groups flunked 10 states, including Vermont, and gave most of the others poor marks. They said inadequate

School of Law's Children Advocacy Institute, gave New Hampshire one of only two A grades for its child abuse disclosure policy - a policy

on releasing information precludes the public scrutiny that often is necessary to reform or beef up child protection efforts.

Nevada received the other A. Twenty-eight states received a C+ or lower grade, including Maine, which received a D+.

"When abuse or neglect lead to a child's death or near death, a state's interest in confidentiality becomes secondary to the interests of taxpayers, advocates and other children, who

See **ABUSE - A6**

ABUSE Continued from A5

would be better served by maximum transparency," said Amy Harfeld, First Star's executive director and report co-author. "Once we know what is broken, we can try to fix it."

About 1,500 children die annually in the United States as a result of child abuse and neglect, the groups said.

In the Bortner case, Cassidy died at York Hospital in York, Maine, after her mother, Amanda Bortner, brought her to her sister's home in Kittery, Maine.

So far, the New Hampshire law

inspired by Cassidy's death has not been used.

"There haven't been child deaths that fit within this circumstance," said Associate Health and Human Services Commissioner Nancy Rollins.

Rollins used to lead the state's Division for Children, Youth and Families, whose social workers investigate child abuse reports. Rollins said the law strikes a balance because the state can withhold the information if it would traumatize the child or compromise prosecutions.

4/29/08