Maine baby's death brings call to clarify abuse-reporting law

AUGUSTA, Maine — The horrifying death of 21-month-old Kassidy Bortner has brought to light what could be life-and-death differences between Maine and New Hampshire's child abuse reporting laws.

And now some lawmakers are calling for changes.

The Rochester, N.H., child died Nov. 9 after repeatedly being subjected to physical abuse. Chad Evans, a boyfriend of Kassidy's mother, Amanda Bortner, is charged with second-degree murder.

Two of those who noticed a deterioration in the child's condition up to the time of her death are Jennifer Conley and her boyfriend, F. Jeffrey Marshall, who baby-sat Kassidy regularly in their Kittery home.

But they apparently never told authorities — and may well not have been required by law to do so.

State Representative Stephen Estes, Democrat of Kittery, said the case highlights a contrast between the reporting laws in Maine and its neighboring state.

In Maine, a specific list of professionals, including doctors, nurses and other medical practitioners, educators, camp counselors, police, clergy, social workers, and others, are required to report signs of abuse to authorities.

Maine's list includes "child care personnel," but it does not appear to apply to baby sitters.

"Unless they're clearly professional child care providers, the law is not clear as to whether in-

formal baby sitters are covered," said Maine Assistant Attorney General Deanna White.

New Hampshire's law is all-inclusive; it requires such reports by anyone who comes into contact with children showing signs of abuse.

Estes wants to bring Maine's law in line with New Hampshire's.

He missed the deadline to sponsor a stand-alone bill, but is looking for other legislation that can be amended to include his proposal.

House majority leader Patrick Colwell is lead sponsor of a $4.8 million domestic abuse prevention bill that still is being refined. The Gardiner Democrat said he will assist Estes in finding a way to advance the abuse-reporting proposal.