

Kassidy autopsy under wraps until trial

Weather postpones today's hearing for murder suspect

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ROCHESTER — Almost four months after 21-month-old Kassidy Bortner died, the complete results of her autopsy are still pending and state prosecutors say that even when the results are final, they will not be revealed to the public.

"We have already gone on the record as to the cause of Kassidy's death," New Hampshire Special Assistant Attorney General Christopher H. M. Carter said last week.

Kassidy's autopsy has been completed, he said, and authorities have issued a statement that her death was caused by blunt-force trauma to her head. Preliminary court documents, too, have shed some light on the kinds of abuse Kassidy may have suffered prior to her death. However, Carter said no additional details concerning the condition of her body will be released before November, when Chad E. Evans stands trial for assaulting and murdering the girl.

Evans, 29, of 191 Milton Road in Rochester was indicted in December on one count of second-degree murder and multiple assault charges in connection with Kassidy's death Nov. 9. Kassidy and her mother, 19-year-old Amanda Bortner, had been living with Evans for about two months prior to Kassidy's death.

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Evans, free on \$100,000 corporate surety bail, was to appear in Strafford County Superior Court today for a preliminary pretrial conference — the first of several hearings leading up to his trial. However, the court was closed this morning because of inclement weather. Information was unavailable when the conference will be rescheduled.

Evans is scheduled to have a status conference May 7 and a final pretrial conference Oct. 25. Jury selection begins Nov. 5.

A preliminary examination of the toddler's body also alludes to the possibility that Cassidy endured other types of abuse during the weeks before her death.

Although Cassidy's autopsy was completed Nov. 10, a spokeswoman for the Maine Chief Medical Examiner's Office

confirmed the results are still pending. She said the length of time involved in the process is not unusual. For murder cases such as Cassidy's, she said, it often takes months before full results are compiled.

Based on the preliminary autopsy results, court documents list Cassidy's injuries as including but not limited to: "bruises on multiple surfaces of Cassidy's head, including the back of her head, the top of her head, and her forehead, chin, lips, temple, and cheek... (And) hemorrhaging in the muscle tissue of Cassidy's abdomen... consistent with being caused by a strong, blunt force such as a punch or kick." The affidavit also lists "pin-point" abrasions on the soles of Cassidy's feet.

Although officials in both Maine and New Hampshire have

said they do not anticipate filing additional charges against anyone in either state in connection with Cassidy's death, rumors of possible sexual abuse against the child have been circulating since her death in November.

The preliminary examination of the child's body at York Hospital indicated that Cassidy's "vagina was irritated and visibly swollen," according to New Hampshire State Police affidavits filed within one week after Cassidy's death. "There also appeared to be irritation to (her) anus."

An affidavit also states the examining physician "made observations of the genital area which he considered to be suspicious, notably it appeared to be an enlarged vaginal vault for the age of the child."

In a recent interview with

Foster's Daily Democrat, one of the individuals present for the examination recalled the event. Through his employment at an area funeral home, Mark J. Sousa was called in to stand by during the preliminary examination.

"During the examination, there was definitely a suspicion of sexual abuse due to certain indications in the private areas of the child's body," Sousa said.

Police and prosecutors have since stated, however, that those assumptions were based only on the preliminary investigation and that evidence does not exist to bring forward charges of sexual abuse against anyone who had contact with Cassidy.

"As I understand it, there are still items pending (in the investigation) so I can't comment

any further," Sousa said when asked about the examination.

Regardless of whatever else may or may not be found in the results of Cassidy's autopsy, Carter said the public would not be privy to that information until Evans stands trial in November.

"Evidentiary details of an autopsy are not public information. ... We will continue to investigate the case, but there are not test results that could be made public that we are waiting to receive," Carter said.

Although the Maine Chief Medical Examiner's Office has conducted the autopsy, the state of New Hampshire has jurisdiction over Evans' case and the release of information.

New Hampshire law prohibits the disclosure of such details prior to a trial, Carter said.