

Grandmother: Truth needed in trial

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DOVER — As Amanda Bortner prepared to testify in her boyfriend's murder trial, her mother asked her to tell the truth — and moments later found herself barred from the courtroom.

Bortner, 19, who now lives in Laconia, spent hours Wednesday and Thursday testifying about her boyfriend's treatment of her daughter, Cassidy, in the months before the toddler died.

Kassidy died Nov. 9, 2000, at the age of 21 months after what authorities have described as weeks of abuse. In medical photographs taken after her death, the toddler's face and head, torso, arms, back, legs and feet show indications of prolonged abuse.

Bortner's boyfriend is Chad E. Evans, 30, a former resident of Keene and Rochester who once served on the Keene Board of Education. He faces a charge of second-degree murder and eight felony counts of assault in connection with the child's death. His trial started Tuesday.

"I asked Amanda to tell the truth. To tell Cassidy's truth," Jacqueline Conley, Amanda Bortner's mother, told Foster's Daily Democrat on Thursday.

Conley said she was not given a reason for being barred from the courtroom Wednesday and doesn't know why the decision was made, but said it happened after she asked her daughter to tell exactly what she knew about Cassidy's death.

"I know it was Chad," Conley said, denying the defense's position that F. Jefferey Marshall, who periodically baby-sat for Cassidy, beat the child to death. Marshall and Conley's daughter Jennifer have been living together for about two years, Conley said.

Conley said Cassidy called Marshall "Uncle Jeffy" and had no fear of him. "You know when a child is afraid of someone — they won't go near them," Conley said.

Although she met Evans only twice before Cassidy's death, Conley said she remembered the toddler being very quiet when he was present.

Kassidy lived with Conley, her husband and her two sons until Bortner moved in with Evans in 2000. Conley said Cassidy lived with the family almost all the time, while Bortner spent many months away while Cassidy was an infant and returned when the child was about 10 months old.

Conley said she hopes Bortner will tell the truth about what happened to Cassidy, but said she has her concerns.

"Her whole being is different. When someone is normal, there's a light in their eyes. That's not there," she said of seeing her daughter for the first time in months when she arrived at Strafford County Superior Court this week.

Bortner has been charged with two counts of endangering the welfare of a child for allegedly refusing to seek medical treatment for Cassidy's injuries and failing to protect her from the abuse she suffered

prior to her death.

On the witness stand Wednesday and again on Thursday, Bortner admitted Evans violated his bail conditions by living with her in the Keene and Brattleboro area. "I was pretty much begging him to sleep over," Bortner said, adding if the subject of the pending case came up, "he always told me to tell the truth."

Earlier in the day, Conley said Bortner would call her during the months she was living with Evans and refuse to give her a phone number or address.

"She would call to ask me about Jeff and Jen ... I wouldn't tell her anything. I knew they — Chad and Mandy — were up to something," Conley said. Later, in the courtroom, Bortner testified she wanted to be with Evans because he gave her support that she didn't get from her family.

"My mother remarried. My stepfather molested me when I was younger and I didn't want to be there," she told defense attorney Alan Cronheim on Thursday.

Before Bortner's testimony, her mother sat outside holding a doll that was Cassidy's and a photograph album filled with the child's pictures. "She lies," she said softly, shaking her head when asked to describe Bortner.

Conley looked down at a photograph in the album. It showed Cassidy as an infant, smiling broadly into the camera. "I think she (Bortner) knew something. ... I pray to God she wasn't part of it. She's my daughter," Conley said.