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On TV talk show

Bortner still blames baby sitter

AG calls interview 'totally untrue'

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DOVER — Amanda Bortner took her version of her daughter's murder to a TV talk show, asserting she should not



KASSIDY BORTNER

be blamed for failing to protect 21-month-old Kassidy from the abuse that claimed her life.

In an episode of the John Walsh Show taped in December but aired Wednesday morning on area ABC affiliates, Bortner told Walsh she was wrongfully convicted

on two counts of endangering the welfare of a child and her boyfriend, Chad E. Evans, was wrongfully convicted of beating the toddler to death.

Bortner, 21, was sentenced Jan. 3 to two years at Strafford County House of Corrections. Evans, 31, is serving a prison term of 28 years to life.

When Walsh asked why Evans was convicted, Bortner replied, "I was coerced into making a false confession." She told him the prosecution had no physical evidence linking Evans to Kassidy's murder.

Reached for comment at his Concord office Wednesday afternoon, Assistant Attorney General David

Ruoff said Bortner's claims are totally untrue — and chided the John Walsh Show for not taking the time to research the case.

"It was clear from watching the show today that they did not understand the extent of the evidence the state had against both Chad Evans and Amanda Bortner," Ruoff said.

He said it was unfortunate the show did not focus on the details of the investigation into Kassidy's death, including the medical evidence that at the time of her death the toddler had five fractures of varied ages: one in each arm, two in one leg and one in her hand.

"She had bruises over bruises at the time of her death. That's all physical evidence of abuse," Ruoff said.

The focus of the episode was whether mothers should be held accountable for the abuse their children suffer if they are not the ones inflicting the actual abuse. Prior to Bortner's appearance in the studio, the show featured Denise Patch and members of her family. Patch plead guilty to a charge of manslaughter in connection with her three-year-old son Dillon's death in Minnesota — in a case that perfectly mirrored Bortner's. Patch was facing prison time of up to 40 years if convicted in a jury trial. Through her plea bargain, she received a sentence of eight years.

While Patch wept throughout the show, Bortner showed no emotion as she answered Walsh's questions and maintained that she and Evans should not be blamed for Kassidy's death.

Bortner told Walsh she had "no knowledge whatsoever" of the abuse Kassidy suffered. She also said she often saw a bruise "here

and there" on her daughter when she came home from the baby-sitter's house. She cast the blame for Kassidy's death on the baby-sitter — the unsuccessful defense used in both Evans' trial and her own.

Walsh then asked why Bortner continued to bring Kassidy to the baby-sitter's house if she saw bruises, Bortner replied she was "young and naive" and the baby-sitter always had excuses for the injuries.

"There is absolutely no evidence to substantiate any claim against the baby-sitter," Ruoff said in reaction to Bortner's claims.

Interviews with Bortner and police in the hours and days following Kassidy's death were all recorded, Ruoff said, and there is no coercion on any of those tapes. Bortner's story changed by the time her boyfriend went to trial in December 2001, he said, but her initial response to police questioning was to say Kassidy

never received injuries while in her baby-sitter's care. By contrast, he said, the baby-sitter's story has remained the same throughout the initial interviews and the two trials.

In separate interviews with police in the hours after Kassidy's death, Bortner and Evans both accused each other of mistreating Kassidy. Evans said Bortner would hit Kassidy and call her "the little bitch." Bortner said if it was determined that a head injury caused Kassidy's death, then Evans was responsible.

Maine Chief Medical Examiner Margaret Greenwald, who conducted Kassidy's autopsy because the toddler died in Maine, ruled the cause of her death to be blunt force injuries to the head and abdomen.

Ruoff also noted that the show did not mention Evans' domestic assault convictions against his former wife, his simple assault conviction against Bortner or the

long list of former friends Bortner who testified that she and Evans would "hide" Kassidy from authorities and certain family members to conceal the extent of abuse on her face and body.

Bortner and Evans' mother, Pam Evans, who attended the show's taping in December, maintained during the show that Evans is innocent of Kassidy's murder.

Pam Evans stopped short of saying she believes Bortner is innocent of the crime of endangering Kassidy's welfare, however.

"I think she's young and naive," she said in response to the question.

Although the episode "I'm Not Responsible" was not shown on The John Walsh Show until this weekend, Bortner knew well in advance that she would eventually appear on the show. He became aware when New Hampshire Police Detective James Bortner apprised him of taped conversations between Bortner and Evans from New Hampshire State Prison. Bortner's bail conditions and Evans' prison sentence precluded any direct contact, but Evans' family and friends were facilitating calls between the two and between Evans and the John Walsh Show.

In listening to those conversations, Ruoff heard Bortner and Evans discuss what she should say on the show, and conversely

between Evans and a female producer.

Ruoff said the show contacted him the day before the episode was taped in December, but due to his schedule as a trial attorney he could not travel to New York City on such short notice. He gave the producer the background of Bortner's case and called back to offer the show access to transcripts, photographs and trial exhibits from the state's case.

"I never heard from them again," Ruoff said.

Bortner, whose bail was revoked shortly after the show was taped, was held pending her sentencing because of the 26 hours of conversations with Evans. During those days before the bail revocation, she traveled to New York City to record the segment for the John Walsh Show.

Ruoff noted that, too, was a violation of bail. However, when he alerted a show producer to that fact he was told a crew would travel to New Hampshire to tape Bortner.

After watching the show, Ruoff said it was clear that was not the case. When the taped show began rolling Wednesday morning, Walsh told the cameras, "Amanda Bortner is here." She later came out on stage and Pam Evans spoke from her seat in the audience at the New York City studio.

Walsh's career in television came as a result of his child advocacy efforts after his six-year-old son Adam was abducted and murdered in 1981. During Wednesday's episode, Walsh noted that some of the nation's existing child protection laws were those he supported during their inception in the 1980s.

Throughout the show, he maintained there are no winners in a case where a child is beaten to death, but stressed the children are the real victims.

Cindy Pierce Lee of Prevent Child Abuse New York, also a guest on the show, said it is a parent's responsibility to be educated about the signs of abuse and protect their children, no matter who is inflicting that abuse.

Walsh said tips on child protection would be posted on the show's Web site, www.john-walsh.tv.

While such tips are helpful, Ruoff said the show missed the reality of Cassidy Bortner's tragic death.

"The fact that they didn't present a balanced perspective of the case means that they didn't do the memory of Cassidy justice. If that's what John Walsh is about, then he failed Cassidy," Ruoff said.