

Parents fight for baby's life

By Steve Kline
The Associated Press

OMAHA — Baby Tabatha's heart stops once a day and doctors revive her.

Every one of the brain-injured baby's vital functions is regulated by machine.

The 3-month-old girl's parents, who say they don't know how she was hurt, are fighting a hospital's decision to remove the child from life support.

Doctors say the baby was shaken violently, severely injuring her brain, and she should be disconnected from the machines.

A juvenile court judge will be asked Monday to decide what happens.

"This child is dead," said Deb Thomas, deputy director of the state Department of Social Services. She said on Thursday that it would be inhumane to keep the baby on life support.

Ronda Renshaw, 22, insists that her child responds to her and will recover.

"When I talk to her she moves her eyes. She's opened them like halfway," Renshaw told Omaha television station KMTV. "She grabs hold of my hand, she holds on to my finger."

Renshaw's attorney said Thursday he would not allow Ms. Renshaw to be interviewed before Friday, and then only under the

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RONDA RENSHAW
mother

condition that no questions would be asked about how her child was injured.

Thomas said that the Douglas County attorney was investigating whether Ms. Renshaw and the child's father, Ronald Davis, 24, were responsible for the child's injuries. Neither has been charged.

The prosecutor's office declined to take part in the hearing set for Monday, saying it had a conflict of interest because of its investigation. A court-appointed attorney will represent the county, while another will represent Tabatha.

Doctors at St. Joseph Hospital concluded Jan. 22 that Tabatha was a victim of Shaken Baby Syndrome, or severe brain injury from being shaken violently, court records say. Both parents told police they found the child lifeless with blue lips, court records say.

The state took temporary custody of the child, but the parents still have parental rights.

Renshaw's attorneys, Michael Bianchi and Martin Cannon, point out that there has been no official finding that Tabatha's parents hurt her. Bianchi said that the Social Services Department and the hospital should not be allowed to end life support without the parents' consent.

"I think it's unusual for the state to seek to terminate life support" before the rights of the parents are considered, said Bianchi. He said the parents were not consulted when a hospital ethics committee decided that life support should end.

Thomas said the Social Services Department did not initiate action to remove life support. Rather, she said, the agency responded to recommendations from medical authorities.

"We deliberate for hours, for days — we cry over these cases, and I mean that literally," she said.

"This child is not going to get better," Thomas said. "She will always be in an ICU (intensive care unit)."

The department has dealt with two other cases in which life support was removed from comatose children this year. The parents did not object in those cases.

Thomas said there had been about a dozen such cases in the last 10 years, including some in which parents objected. She could not say how many.

Omaha museum hindered by financial problems

OMAHA (AP) — The vision that organizers had for the Great Plains Black Museum may be fading.

The museum is in trouble, under tremendous financial strain and other problems.

Bertha Calloway has been the museum's curator, promoter, fundraiser, researcher and bookkeeper for 20 years. She had to cut her time at the museum after undergoing brain surgery in 1993.

Her son, Jim Calloway, said fundraising had been stagnant.

Calloway stopped short of saying the museum might close, but said the museum couldn't continue the way it had been going.

"We just can't have another year of going day to day with no working budget," he said this week. "We may have to downsize instead of upsize if that's what it takes."

The museum has trimmed its hours, the heating of the building and staff positions. The building needs repairs, and some of the archives are deteriorating because the museum can't afford to preserve them properly.

If the museum closes, it will mark

the end of a cultural institution that has existed in north Omaha for more than 20 years.

Bertha Calloway and her husband, James, who is now deceased, purchased the original Nebraska Telephone Co. building in 1974 and filled it with Bertha Calloway's personal black history collection.

The building now is on the National Register of Historic Places.

During February — Black History Month — many corporations and schools rely on the museum for help with black history programs. Bertha Calloway said she had dreams of providing even more services, but there had been setbacks.

Jim Calloway, who managed a restaurant in Lincoln before moving back to Omaha, has run the museum since 1993 with a part-time tour guide.

"I'm doing everything I can to keep the museum above water, but my main concern is my mother and her health," he said. "I'd like for it to be that she could spend time with tours and lectures and not have to be bothered with day-to-day operations."

Leitzel

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loo said Leitzel's departure surprised her.

"Until this opportunity came along, she was focused on staying here," O'Brien said. "I'm really sorry to see her go."

While UNL officials said they were sorry that Leitzel would leave, officials from UNH said Thursday they were pleased she accepted.

Tom Trout, one of 16 members of the president search committee, said they chose Leitzel because of her leadership and experience.

"We were impressed by her insight, vision and experience," Trout said. "She was able to form a vision of where this campus could go and how to get there."

Trout said the vote to select Leitzel was unanimous, and there was no second choice.

"She seemed to be the right person for us at the right time," he said. "Her openness, integrity, style and strong rule impressed us."

Arthur Grant, secretary of the University of New Hampshire sys-

tem, said a special meeting of the Board of Trustees on April 9 would make Leitzel's appointment official.

The board needs to elect Leitzel to the position.

"This search has been under way for two years," Grant said. "The chancellor and the search committee expect that she will be elected by the board."

Grant said Leitzel's salary must be approved but should be \$155,000 per year. She also will live in the president's house on campus and receive a car.

Leitzel now earns \$142,000 per year.

Mooser said an interim senior vice chancellor would be appointed within the next few weeks. He will consult with deans, the Academic Senate executive committee and the chancellor's cabinet to make a selection.

He wants to begin a national search for Leitzel's replacement as quickly as possible, Mooser said.

Leitzel said she planned to make Durham her home and stay there for good.

"I plan to stay forever," she said. "I never plan to do this again."

Schools concerned about guns

KEARNEY (AP) — Guns are no more prevalent in Kearney Public Schools than they were years ago, a school official said, but he still believes a federal law requiring a weapons policy is useful.

"I think we all want safe schools," said Larry Sweley, director of student services. "And anytime those schools are at risk, I think everybody in a caring environment wants those things improved."

Sweley said weapons in school hadn't been much of a problem over the years.

"I do not believe we have more incidents (in Kearney) now than we had years and years ago," Sweley said. "I do think our enforcement has changed because we're concerned about safer school environments."

The federal law requires school districts to have a policy against guns and to punish students who violate it with a one-year expulsion.

Lexington Superintendent Gary Druckemiller said he liked the law.

"It sends a clear message that Congress is concerned about the problem, and we plan to follow the intent of the law," he said.

Schools in Broken Bow, Minden and Holdrege have had to suspend students because of gun incidents.

Guns and knives are the weapons of most concern. Druckemiller said knives had been more of a problem in Lexington.

"We don't think we have a problem with guns here," Druckemiller said. "Our high school principal, Tom Kruger, has worked hard to tell the


kids that if they bring a gun to school, it will be taken from them and they will be suspended from school."

Druckemiller said if any type of gun was brought on to school grounds, it would be confiscated and the student would be suspended for one year.


In October 1994, a Broken Bow High School student was expelled for a year for bringing a starter's pistol to study hall. A second high school student was suspended for firing a paint gun outside the school.

Superintendent Scott Maline said Minden had suspended one student as a result of a violation of the school gun policy.

"The handgun situation is out of control," he said. "We need new laws. It hasn't hit central Nebraska yet, but in the big cities it's a real problem."




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