

Life-support may continue

OMAHA (AP) — A brain-injured baby might stay on life-support machines until a court decides whether her parents injured her, the state Department of Social Services said Thursday.

Douglas County Juvenile Court Judge Douglas Johnson set an April 29 hearing on allegations that 3-month-old Tabatha Renshaw's parents, Ronda Renshaw and Ronald Davis, inflicted the brain injuries.

DSS attorney Doug Dexter said the judge sent him a letter informing him of the date. Dexter said he was not sure that it meant Johnson would wait until after April 29 to rule on a request to end life-support for Tabatha.

"I read that as he wants to leave the door open," Dexter said. Attorneys for the parents did not return a phone message left at their office. The judge declined comment.

The Social Services Department supports a recommendation by St. Joseph Hospital to remove the machines that have kept Tabatha alive since Jan. 22.

Doctors at the hospital say that the life support, which consists of a tube inserted through an incision in her neck that keeps Tabatha breathing as well as tubes that feed her and provide medications, is futile because it will not correct her brain damage. The doctors say the treatment is only prolonging her death.

Lawyers for the parents say the treatment is preserving the baby's life,

and that the parents alone should decide whether she stays on life-support.

The department has temporary custody of the baby because abuse is suspected. Tabatha's parents object to ending life support.

The Department of Social Services took the life-support question to Judge Johnson in a hearing that started Monday and ended Wednesday.

Doctors said Tabatha might have been shaken so hard that her brain was critically injured.

The Douglas County attorney's office is investigating how the baby was injured. Neither parent has been charged with any criminal offense, and they have said they don't know how Tabatha was hurt. Criminal prosecution would involve a process separate from the juvenile court action.

The April 29 hearing, called an "adjudication," will be held to determine whether Tabatha should remain in Social Services' care or be returned to her parents. That would clarify somewhat the question of precisely who has custody of Tabatha.

Ronda Renshaw and Ronald Davis still have parental rights regarding Tabatha. Those rights could be taken away by the court — but that process could take years. It is conceivable that Tabatha would remain on life-support until the parental rights issue is settled.

The court involvement in the question over whether life-support should be maintained is rare, and that is because the parents object, said medical

ethicist Charles Dougherty of Creighton University. Dougherty, a member of the St. Joseph Hospital ethics committee that recommended life support be ended for Tabatha, said thousands of similar decisions are made every week across the country.

Dougherty, who testified during the life-support hearing that St. Joseph Hospital was following generally accepted bioethical standards, said that even though the machines are maintaining the functions of Tabatha's biological systems, they are not restoring her humanity.

"She has in effect lost any capacity of being a human individual," he said in an interview prior to taking the stand.

Regina Makaitis, a special prosecutor representing the Douglas County attorney's office, said she found a single similar case in her research.

In 1979, the Colorado Supreme Court ruled that life-support could be ended for a brain-injured child over the objection of the parents. The parents in that case also were suspected of child abuse.

The major difference between the Colorado case and Tabatha Renshaw's case is that the Colorado child was brain-dead — meaning no brain activity could be detected.

Machines detect some brain activity in Tabatha, but her doctors say it is involuntary brain-stem activity and that the higher functioning of her brain will not be restored.

Parents pay for children's truancy

GRAND ISLAND (AP) — Hall County Attorney Ellen Totzke wants parents to get serious about getting their children to school.

Nine adults, parents of six Grand Island teen-agers, were charged in Hall County Court with compulsory education-attendance violations. Class III misdemeanors, for their children not attending school.

The parents face a maximum \$500 fine and three months in jail if convicted. But Totzke doesn't want to go so far as to jail the parents.

"The parents are key to getting the kids to school," she said. "Maybe there's a little more incentive for them to pull the kids out of bed and get them to school. We're trying to figure out what will work."

Prosecuting parents for truancy is a first in Hall County, she said.

"Before, we have filed juvenile petitions alleging that the kids weren't attending school. Juvenile court is limited to what they can do with them," Totzke said. "We don't have control over the parents in those kinds of cases. It's time for the parents to take responsibility for their children. The old approach didn't work, so we're trying a new one."

The students are 13 through 15 years old and attend Barr Junior High, Walnut Junior High or Grand Island Senior High, court documents said.

Charged Tuesday were Larry and Cathy Bredthauer, parents of Aaron

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ELLEN TOTZKE
Hall County Attorney

Bredthauer; Khamdeng and Lek Sayakhom, parents of William Sayakhom; Monte and Tammy Malone, parents of Amber Malone; Linda Herbert, parent of Richard Dvorak; Rose Ventura, parent of Ulysses Ventura; and Tina May, parent of Michael Perry.

"I don't think it's fair. I don't think I've violated a law," Bredthauer said. "I thought we could deal with his school situation without going to court."

Bredthauer admits her son, Aaron, is no saint, and getting him to school some days is like pulling teeth.

"Since he's hit adolescence, it's been difficult," Bredthauer said.

William Sayakhom, 15, wasn't happy when his parents received the letter from the county attorney's office this week. "I don't want my parents to go to court," he said.

Most days William doesn't arrive at Walnut Junior High until 10 or 11 a.m. His dad doesn't wake him up, he said, and an alarm clock doesn't do the trick either.

The teen already has to take one semester over because of lost time. His school warned him about being late so many times, and William said he has let his parents down.

"I'm kind of disappointed," he said.

The parents are violating the state Compulsory Education Attendance Law. Charges apply to parents of children ages 7 through 16 who have unexcused absences and are habitually truant from school. Once students turn 16, they can't be required to attend school, Totzke said.

"If kids miss school, we have a legal obligation to get them in school," Superintendent Lane Plugge said. He said students are truant if they have unexcused absences for three consecutive days.

Hall County Judges Philip Martin and David Bush handle such cases.

Martin said truancy is "a problem for the child and the parents. Maybe it's time to focus on the parents' part of the responsibility. The resources and the options we have in juvenile court are limited."

Brown

Continued from Page 1

And the Army field headquarters in Tuzla, Bosnia, assembled an emergency team to help search for bodies amid high winds and sheets of rain.

"We have found the last victim," Croatian Interior Minister Ivan Jarnjak told the state HINA news agency today, confirming that none of the 33 aboard survived the crash of the U.S. Air Force plane.

The State Department was waiting

to release the names of the victims pending notification of their families.

Clinton, visiting the Commerce Department's Washington headquarters on Wednesday to deliver the tragic news, praised Brown.

"He was one of the best advisers and ablest people I ever knew. And he was very, very good at everything he ever did," Clinton told about 700 Commerce employees, several huddled together in stunned sorrow.

With first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, Vice President Al Gore and most of the Cabinet on hand, Clinton

led Brown's subordinates in silent prayer.

Clinton and his wife joined a parade of friends and dignitaries who trekked to Brown's home to comfort his wife, Alma. Longtime political allies of the former Democratic Party chief — Sen. Edward Kennedy and others — were among the visitors.

Housing Secretary Henry Cisneros described the mood in the Brown household.

"They're proud, and they have a lot of reason to be proud of Ron's accomplishments. They are strong people, and they're holding up," Cisneros said.

of the Big 12" issue reported that Charlyne Berens, an assistant news-editorial professor, was a panelist in a recent discussion about pornography.

The panel, comprised of campus

and community leaders, was organized by the UNL Theater Department in conjunction with the production of "Miss Autobody." Berens was the only panelist from the field of journalism.

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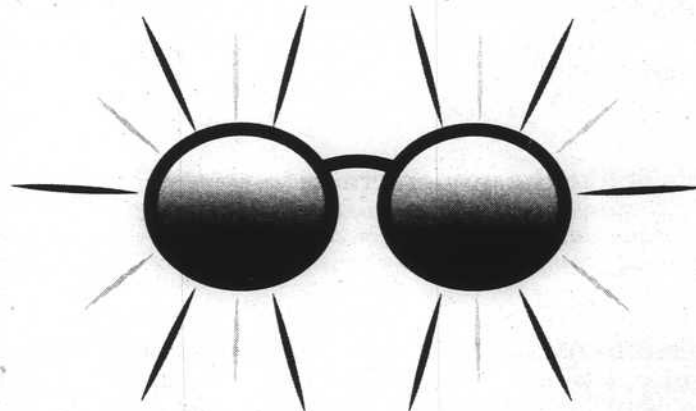
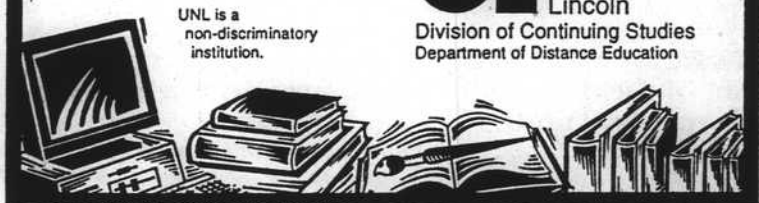
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Corrections Clarifications

A story in Tuesday's Daily Nebraskan about Playboy's "Women