

LAWYER TAKES ISSUE AS DEAD BABY'S MOTHER FACES CHARGES

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Disturbed that the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office filed a criminal child abuse charge against a mother who left her baby with a stranger at a bus stop -- a baby later found slain -- a Detroit police officer asked a top local criminal defense lawyer to take the mother's case.

Detroit lawyer Steven Fishman agreed not only to represent Shaniqua Betty, but to do it for free.

"It is ironic to me that the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, which purports to represent victims, has chosen -- over the objection of its investigating officers -- to charge someone who is actually the ultimate victim," Fishman said Wednesday.

Ruth Carter, a spokeswoman for prosecutor Michael Duggan, said, "at some point, we have to protect children, and that's going to be the policy of this office."

Police officials downplayed differences between the prosecutor's office and investigators who did not want her charged.

Chief Charles Wilson "wants to make it emphatically clear that the department does not take a stance on this matter," said Second Deputy Chief Paula Bridges. "We enforce the law and we provide the case information to the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office and they make a decision on whether they want to charge a person in whatever case there is."

Cmdr. Dennis Richardson, who supervised the search for 3-month-old Isaiah Lewis, said he supported Duggan's decision to charge Betty. "It was a difficult decision but he made it for the good of the community."

In announcing the charge Tuesday, Duggan said some officers had "bonded" with Betty during the six-day search. But he said his office will charge any parent whose actions lead to a child's death or injury.

Fishman said he was asked to take the case by Investigator Ira Todd of the Violent Crimes Task Force, who interviewed Betty during the search. Fishman represented Betty, 20, of Pontiac, at her arraignment Wednesday in 36th District Court in Detroit.

Magistrate Thomas Shannon set a \$10,000 personal bond. Betty was released from police headquarters about an hour later and drove off with the baby's father, Ivan Brown Jr. of Detroit.

Betty faces an Oct. 1 preliminary examination on a charge of second-degree child abuse. If convicted, she faces a possible 4-year prison sentence.

Isaiah Lewis was found six days after the stranger took him from the bus stop at State Fair and Woodward. **Harold Reed** , 48, of Detroit, a convicted child molester, is charged with first-degree murder and child abuse. His preliminary examination is to take place today.

Betty was arraigned via closed-circuit television from police headquarters, where she had turned herself in shortly after 8 a.m. Wearing a yellow oversized shirt, she answered "yes" to most of Shannon's questions. When she had trouble understanding one legal point, Fishman went over it three times.

From age 11 to 19, Betty was a court ward in Oakland County because she had been abused by her father. A special education student, Betty was certified as educably mentally impaired.

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Caption: Photo

Shaniqua Betty

Steven Fishman

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