

MOM IS CHARGED IN BABY'S DEATH - DETROIT 9-MONTH-OLD WAS DISCOVERED WRAPPED IN PLASTIC BAG

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The mother of a 9-month-old whose body was hidden in the basement of a house in northeast Detroit for more than a week was charged Monday with first-degree murder.

Jessica O'Neal, 21, is charged with smothering her baby, **Malik O'Neal**, on Dec. 8, wrapping his body in a blue plastic trash bag and hiding it in a cabinet in the basement.

O'Neal was arraigned by video late Monday before Magistrate Renee McDuffee in 36th District Court in Detroit.

The boy's grandmother, Lillian Leak, said she last saw Malik on Dec. 8 and noticed him missing the following day. Leak said when she asked **O'Neal** - her son's girlfriend - where Malik was, **O'Neal** claimed a friend was caring for him.

That went on for seven days until **O'Neal** left Leak's Hickory Avenue home on Dec. 15. She ended up at St. John Hospital in a diabetic medical crisis. **O'Neal** then told a doctor Malik was missing and may have been kidnapped.

When police arrived at the hospital and asked about the baby, **O'Neal** told officers: "I don't want to go to jail," according to a police report filed in district court.

Detroit Police Officer Irvan Higgins asked, "Why would you go to jail?"

She responded: "The baby would not stop crying and I had the pillow and he stopped breathing."

On Saturday, police found Malik's body in the basement of Leak's home near East 7 Mile and Schoenherr.

The boy's father, Milo Leak, has been in the Macomb County Jail on a concealed weapons charge for two months. His mother said he warned her that **O'Neal** might try to kill Malik.

She said she'd also contacted child protective services in July and reported suspected abuse of Malik. Leak said investigators came to their home twice, but did not remove the child from **O'Neal**'s care.

State officials declined to comment Monday on the case.

According to records in the juvenile division of Wayne County Family Court, **O'Neal** was a temporary ward of the court between 2000 and 2004 because of her mother's mental condition and **O'Neal**'s inability to deal with her own diabetes.

She was diagnosed with Type 1 juvenile diabetes when she was 14, but, according to the court records, she could not or would not follow doctors' orders on taking insulin and watching her intake of sugar.

Her father, Carl Jenkins, died in August 1999 and, according to the court records, **O'Neal** never came to terms with his death.

"She appears to experience an abnormal and excessive reaction to life stressors," a 2004 juvenile court report said.

One evaluator said **O'Neal**, then 18, had an adjustment disorder characterized by a depressed mood, low energy, little eye contact, frequent verbalizing of low self-esteem and unresolved guilt issues.

During four years of foster care, **O'Neal** frequently ran away from foster homes and failed to attend school, although Lillian Leak said **O'Neal** graduated from a special education program in 2004 at Denby High School in Detroit.

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo

CAPTION: Malik **O'Neal**'s body was discovered by police on Saturday. He was found in the basement of his grandmother's home.

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