

SECURITY LAPSE AT MAXEY REPORTED

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HOWELL -- Staff members at the W.J. Maxey Boys Training School failed to follow security procedures at least twice and cannot account for all of a suspect's time on the day a social worker was strangled at the juvenile facility, law enforcement officials said Friday.

The officials said the Maxey employee in charge of a cleanup crew that included **Jermell Johnson**, the 19-year-old suspect in the slaying, left the crew unsupervised for a time while he went out for an unauthorized lunch at a nearby Arby's.

Then **Johnson** was not properly monitored and clocked during his return walk from his work detail to his room, the investigators said.

Investigators said the social worker, Barbara Synnestvedt, 46, was not killed during the supervisor's luncheon absence, but that **Johnson** may have used the time to gain a key to the lounge area where she was killed, or to set up some ruse to gain entry later, perhaps claiming he would be in to clean.

State police recovered a broom with blood on it from a kitchen where **Johnson** had been working across the hall from the lounge, an investigator said. Broom fibers were also recovered near Synnestvedt's body.

Johnson was arraigned Friday in 53rd District Court in Howell on a charge of open murder in the counselor's death. Judge Frank DelVero ordered him jailed without bond pending a May 19 preliminary examination.

Johnson was sent to Maxey's Green Oak Center in 1990 after pleading guilty to first-degree criminal sexual conduct in the knifepoint rape of a 36-year-old Detroit woman.

One of Synnestvedt's former coworkers, who has since taken a related job and spoke on condition that she not be named, said that "there are numerous close calls" inside Green Oak and that it should have video cameras to monitor residents.

"I knew it was just a matter of time before someone got killed," she said. "When I heard about Barb I said, but for the grace of God, that could have been me."

"They need a way to call for help or a listening device so they know if you go down," the former coworker said. "They need rules that keep up with the toughness of the kids."

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