

CHILD DIED WHILE AUNT RAN DRUGS, COURT TOLD - BOY, 7, LEFT ALONE AS FIRE SWEEPED HIS DETROIT HOME

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Shirley Lippett 's cell phone rang as she was making an early morning run to sell crack cocaine, prosecutors said Tuesday. The caller informed her that her home was burning and her 7-year-old nephew was inside.

Lippett , 52, was charged Tuesday with second-degree child abuse in connection with the April 30 death of her nephew, Gary Young. Gary, a first-grader at Van Zile Elementary School, was alone in his home in northeast Detroit when it caught fire about 2:30 a.m.

"We charged that Ms. **Lippett** did cause serious physical harm by committing a reckless act," said Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Patricia Leonard. "The reckless act is leaving the child home alone without adult or adequate supervision."

Leonard said she has a witness who will testify in 36th District Court that **Lippett** and her 37-year-old boyfriend left the home on St. Louis at 1:45 a.m. to make a crack-cocaine sale in Utica.

"They left the child alone to make a drug run," Leonard said. "They were getting calls that day for drugs."

Lippett was Gary's guardian, although his mother still lives in the Detroit area, Leonard said. **Lippett** 's boyfriend was not charged.

The witness, whom Leonard would not identify, will also testify that **Lippett** was en route to make the deal when someone called her cell phone to tell her about the fire. **Lippett** returned to the home between 3 and 4 a.m., Leonard said. Gary was already dead of smoke inhalation.

Firefighters found Gary in a hallway outside his bedroom. They placed him on the front lawn and tried to resuscitate him, but it was too late.

"It appears he was trying to get out of the home," Leonard said.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation and it appears to have been accidental or electrical.

A warrant was issued for **Lippett** 's arrest Tuesday. She is expected to turn herself in and be arraigned today.

If convicted, she will face up to four years in prison.

Leonard said **Lippett** is unemployed.

Meanwhile, students at Gary's school are still grieving and preparing for his funeral later this week.

"This was a tragedy all the way around," Van Zile Elementary Principal Elsie Dade said Tuesday.

Leonard, who is deputy chief of the prosecutor's child and family abuse bureau, said incidents such as Gary's death happen too often in Detroit.

"Parents have to stop leaving guns out, leaving kids alone in cars and leaving children home alone," she said. "Incidents like this are foreseeable and they will happen."

Visiting hours for Gary are 1-9 p.m. today at Cantrell Funeral Home, 10400 Mack in Detroit. The funeral is scheduled for noon Friday at New Greater Zion Hill Church, 15230 Mack in Detroit.

Contact BEN SCHMITT at 313-222-6597 or schmitt@freepress.com.

(SIDEBAR)

REPORT NEGLECT

To report children being left alone or maltreated in any way, call the Michigan Parent Help hot line at 800-942-4357 anytime. Hot line workers refer child abuse and neglect complaints to local Child Protective Services offices. The 24-hour CPS hot line is 313-396-0300 in Wayne County; in Oakland County, it's 248-975-5010, and in Macomb County, 586-412-6109.

A drawing of a picnic scene by Gary Young, 7, from his Van Zile Elementary School journal. On Tuesday, he told a teacher he feared being left home alone. Early Wednesday, he died of smoke inhalation in a fire in his northeast Detroit home. He had been left alone.

Caption: Photo

Gary Young, a first-grader at Van Zile Elementary School, died April 30 of smoke inhalation at his northeast Detroit home.

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