

STATE COULD NOT SAVE DETROIT BOY - DEATH OF THE 3-YEAR-OLD CAME AFTER A GRIM LIFE

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Friday, November 7, 2003

Author: JACK KRESNAK FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Because his mother was a drug addict and his two older sisters had been raped, Michigan's child protection system was deeply involved in the life of 3-year-old **Cesol Thompson**.

But it wasn't enough.

Cesol died Monday, beaten to death in his father's east-side Detroit home.

"It's tragic, and it's horrible," Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Patricia Leonard said Thursday. Leonard heads the prosecutor's Child and Family Abuse Bureau.

No arrests have been made pending further details from an autopsy. So far there is no indication that any professional failed in a way that contributed to **Cesol's** death, Leonard said.

Cesol's is among at least four deaths of abused or neglected children who were under the watch of the Family Independence Agency and its contract agencies this year in Wayne County.

Leonard said her office is interviewing witnesses and reviewing case records while investigating the circumstances of **Cesol's** death.

"We're reviewing the entire case file involving all the children and any injuries to those children and how they might relate to this case," Leonard said.

"The FIA is in total cooperation with our investigation," Leonard said.

According to Wayne County Family Court records, **Cesol** and his three sisters -- then ages 15, 11 and 11 months -- were placed in foster care in July 2002 after they were found alone in his father's home on Bedford Street, where the electricity had been turned on illegally.

The father of the three youngest children, Hendricks Pedereaux, told FIA investigators that the power had been shut off because the bill had not been paid. He said he didn't know it was illegal to bypass the meter and turn it back on.

Pedereaux, now 34, was not listed on the children's birth certificates. He established legal paternity for the three children in July 2002. .

Court records said that **Cesol** tested positive for marijuana when he was born in June 2000. His mother, Latonya **Thompson**, now 32, later admitted that she had a crack habit. Her compliance with court orders to get treatment for her addiction and to frequently visit her children was spotty at best.

Thompson was described in court records as being angry with the court, social service workers and foster parents. She frequently created scenes at the agency supervising the kids' foster care -- the Lula Belle Stewart Center in Detroit -- and in juvenile court.

In April 2002, Detroit police arrested Willie Jones, now 31, a friend of **Thompson**, on charges of sexually assaulting her second daughter. Jones pleaded guilty and is serving time in prison.

Thompson's oldest daughter was raped by an 18-year-old man in 2001. He also was convicted and sentenced to prison. The teenager bore a child as a result of the sexual assault, records said.

In May 2003, the youngest child -- a girl then 22 months old -- was hospitalized with meningitis. X-rays revealed a small skull fracture.

The girl had been living with foster parents and, along with **Cesol** and one sister, had been making unsupervised visits to their father's home on weekends.

Child Protective Services and Detroit police investigated the injury, but because doctors could not adequately determine when the injury occurred, the case was closed without establishing what had happened.

Pedereaux, who could not be reached for comment, was in full compliance with all court orders while the children were in foster care, including picking up the kids for weekend visits and bringing them back, records show.

At a July 14 hearing, workers from the Lula Belle Stewart Center and the FIA recommended that **Cesol** and the second-oldest daughter be returned to their father's care. The youngest child remained in foster care.

Referee Peter Schummer ordered the two children returned to Pedereaux, although they remained temporary wards of the court. Social service workers were to continue supervising the children's care with frequent home visits, Schummer ordered.

Leonard said social service workers had visited Pedereaux's home to check on the children four times in the past 30 days, including a visit Sunday, the day before **Cesol** died.

"It's important to note that we don't see any neglect on the part of the workers," Leonard said.

According to police, Pedereaux was at work Monday, and his 18-year-old girlfriend was watching **Cesol** . Some friends of the girlfriend came to visit, saw that the child was not breathing and contacted police.

He was dead on arrival at St. John Hospital. Injuries included bruises on his arms and abdomen and a gash on his chin, Leonard said.

Contact JACK KRESNAK at 313-223-4544 or kresnak@freepress.com.

Memo: CHILDREN FIRST

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS

Page: 1A

Index Terms: CESOL THOMPSON; DETROIT ; CHILD ; DEATH ; INVESTIGATION

Record Number: 0311070215

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