

Emaciated Houston toddler's condition improves

By PEGGY O'HARE, PAIGE HEWITT and MIKE GLENN Copyright 2009 Houston Chronicle

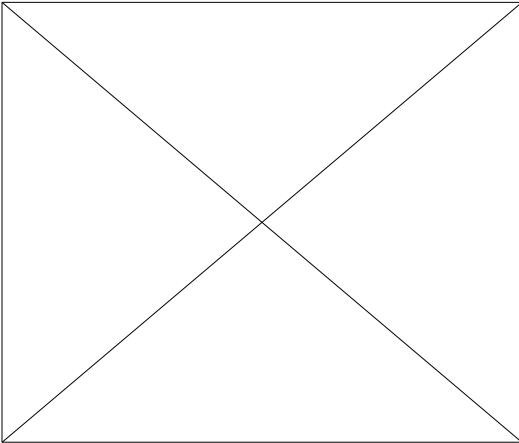
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Harris County Sheriff's Office

Marcia Bert Holliday

Resources



Though Kayvon Lewis could not speak, his body told a horror story when doctors examined him at Children's Memorial Hermann Hospital.

He was 3 years old, but was the size of a 6-month-old baby, weighing just 17 pounds — about half of what a child his age should weigh, according to Child Protective Services.

Yet he was 35.8 inches tall, just shy of 3 feet. He showed serious developmental delays — he could roll over, smile and laugh, but was unable to walk or talk.

Doctors determined he had been starved, and on Tuesday, his mother, Marcia Bert Holliday, 30, remained in the Harris County Jail, charged with injury to child causing serious bodily injury by omission, a first-degree felony.

While Kayvon's older siblings, a 5-year-old girl and 6-year-old boy, showed no signs of abuse or starvation, they had never been enrolled in school, CPS officials said. Authorities have since placed those children together in a foster home.

Holliday, who previously has been investigated by child welfare officials, was arrested last week after she took the youngest child to Children's Memorial Hospital, where staff alerted law enforcement. The emaciated child was placed on intravenous fluids because his heart was so fragile, but by Tuesday night his condition had improved from critical to serious.

He remains in serious condition today, officials said. His siblings were scheduled to visit a doctors, and investigators continue to interview family members.

Holliday — a single, unemployed mother who came to Houston three years ago from Houma, La. — was the subject of two unrelated CPS investigations last year, the child welfare agency said.

In both previous cases, child abuse was not found or was ruled out. And in both prior cases, a CPS caseworker with less than a year's experience was sent to check on the family.

Holliday denied being an inadequate mother during a jailhouse interview Tuesday night and said her son's weight fluctuated up and down due to his medical problems, including seizures and asthma.

"I'm a good mom. I'm not a bad parent," Holliday said. "I'm not what these people are trying to say that I am."

She said her hospitalized son was treated by physicians both in Houston and Louisiana.

"My family knows that I wouldn't do anything to harm my children. They mean the world to me," she said.

The case broke Thursday night when Holliday showed up at the hospital with the emaciated toddler and reported she couldn't get him to eat.

Though it resulted in her arrest, Holliday said she doesn't regret taking Kayvon to the hospital.

Holliday said she had taken the boy to his pediatrician in August because he would not eat and had several seizures a day, said Estella Olguin, spokeswoman for Texas Child Protective Services.

"She said he stopped eating," Olguin said. "She tells us she should have sought treatment earlier."

Doctors reported the boy's seizures and asthma would not cause him to nearly starve to death, CPS said.

"There's no reason other than parental neglect for his starvation," Olguin said.

Holliday receives disability payments from Social Security for the child's medical conditions, Olguin said.

Holliday moved in to an apartment at 14335 Ella a month ago and listed all three of her children on the lease, an assistant manager said. All three children have different fathers, and none is believed to be involved with them, Olguin said.

At the apartments where Holliday used to live at 13030 Northborough, a neighbor who asked not to be identified said Holliday's two older children did not appear to be starving, but were hungry and disheveled when they visited.

The neighbor said she observed the youngest boy lying on a bed, but said he appeared unable to move or function. Holliday told her the child was disabled, the neighbor said.

As far back as January 2008, CPS received a report that the boy was malnourished. After a CPS investigation, no abuse was found, and Early Childhood Intervention services were offered to the family, Olguin said.

In November 2008, CPS was told Holliday was failing to provide prescribed medicine to the boy, but CPS determined he had the necessary medicine and ruled out allegations of abuse.

Holliday, who has no criminal history in Harris County, will be drug-tested and evaluated for mental illness. She is jailed in lieu of \$20,000 bail. Her court-appointed attorney, Stephanie Lynn Martin, could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

Chronicle reporter Terri Langford contributed to this story.

[**peggy.ohare@chron.com**](mailto:peggy.ohare@chron.com)

[**paige.hewitt@chron.com**](mailto:paige.hewitt@chron.com)

[**mike.glenn@chron.com**](mailto:mike.glenn@chron.com)