

Caregiver charged with manslaughter in toddler's drowning death ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

The operator of an unregulated home daycare has been charged with manslaughter in the death of a toddler who drowned in the bathtub of a North York apartment last summer.

Police charged Maria Sosa, 34, on Friday. Allison Tucker, 2, was found not breathing in Sosa's Wilmington Ave. and Sheppard Ave. W. apartment on July 4.

She was pronounced dead in hospital.

Sosa had been caring for Allison for at least a year before the tragedy. Earlier, police said Sosa admitted she was distracted while looking after the child and momentarily left her alone.

interview with the Star last summer, Sosa's husband, Martin Amado, said his wife had also been watching their two young sons that summer day.

Allison was a "lovely little girl," Amando said last summer.

The Sosas' neighbour in the apartment building said she often saw Allison when she was dropped off and picked up daily by her mother. Allison, who was nearly 3, spoke very clearly and seemed much older than her age, Grace Pina told the Star last July.

The Star could reach neither the Tucker nor Sosa families Friday night.

Toronto Police Const. Sarah Diamond said Friday that an autopsy revealed "various injuries" that "substantiated" the charges against Sosa. But for investigative reasons an exact cause of death could not be disclosed, she said.

Under Ontario's Coroners Act, autopsy reports are not public and are released only to the family of the deceased and police.

Allison was the first of three children who died in unregulated home daycares last year. The deaths sparked calls for more government oversight and for more licensed daycare. With licensed spots available for just one in five Ontario children under age 12, most parents are forced to use unregulated care for their kids when they work or study.

Allison died less than a week before 2-year-old Eva Ravikovich was found dead in an illegal home daycare in Vaughan where police found 27 children and 14 dogs.

Unregulated home daycare operators are allowed to care for a maximum of five children under age 10 in addition to their own kids.

In November, 9-month old Aspen Moore died in an unregulated Markham home daycare.

No charges have been laid in the other two deaths, although the coroner and police say they are still investigating.

In October, charges were upgraded to manslaughter against April Luckese, the operator of an unregulated Mississauga home daycare where a 14-month-old was fatally injured in January 2011. Her case is expected to go to trial later this year.

In December, Education Minister Liz Sandals introduced the some of the toughest legislation governing unregulated daycares in the country.

If passed, the legislation would impose a hard cap of five children under age 10 for unregulated home daycare operators. Currently, caregivers don't have to count their own kids. They would also be limited to just two children under age 2. Currently, unregulated caregivers can look after five babies in addition to their own kids.

Maximum fines for violators would jump from the current \$2,000 to \$250,000 if the ministry takes the operator to court. The law would also allow ministry inspectors to immediately close illegal operations and issue fines of up to \$100,000.

"It's so sad that it has to take these kind of tragedies to push Ontario into making some really big changes in child care," said policy expert Martha Friendly of the Child Care Resource and Research Unit.

The fact that Allison died in what appears to have been a legal unregulated home daycare shows that more regulation is needed, Friendly added.

"Changes are needed to make all forms of child care better," she said.

Sosa will appear in Old City Hall court on Saturday.

-reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: unregulated ^[3]

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