

Mother Of Emaciated Missouri Child Pleads Guilty **News**

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Posted on : 2013/11/20 4:58:39

JOPLIN, Mo. (AP) — A Joplin woman, accused of starving her preschool-age daughter, pleaded guilty Monday to child abuse in a plea deal that would limit any prison time she might be assessed to no more than 15 years.



Beth A. Williams, 28, pleaded guilty to child abuse or neglect during a hearing in Jasper County Circuit Court in Joplin. Williams had been facing a count of first-degree assault and two counts of child endangerment with respect to her daughter, Cameron Williams.

The girl was removed from her care and custody in July 2012 at the age of 3 after she was taken to a Joplin hospital unconscious and weighing barely 12 pounds. The child tested at a blood sugar level of zero, according to a probable-cause affidavit.

Under terms of the plea deal, the two child endangerment charges would be dismissed and the Class A felony count of assault would be reduced to a Class B felony offense of child abuse or neglect, which carries a punishment range of five to 15 years. Williams had been facing the possibility of 10 to 30 years or up to life in prison.

Circuit Judge Gayle Crane delayed formal action on the plea bargain and ordered the completion of a sentencing-assessment report. The judge set Williams's sentencing hearing for Feb. 17.

Williams told a judge at a preliminary hearing more than a year ago that she had never been in trouble with the law before and that no previous reports had been made to the Missouri Department of Social Services regarding her daughter.

At that hearing, Assistant Prosecutor Kimberly Fisher interrupted that claim to inform the judge that Williams figured into a previous child endangerment case brought against her domestic partner, Christina Haidle, in 2004 in Newton County. Haidle lost custody of one of her children in that case, according to what Fisher told the judge.

Haidle, 28, was charged with the same offenses as Williams in the case involving Williams's daughter. She has pleaded not guilty. Both women have remained in custody on \$125,000 bonds.

They were living at 1407 S. Pennsylvania Ave. when the emaciated girl's condition came to the attention of doctors and child abuse investigators. Haidle told investigators that she stayed home and took care of her son and Williams's daughter while Williams held down a job as a manager at a local pizzeria. Both children were taken into protective custody when the two women were arrested.

A doctor who provided care to the Williams girl throughout her first year of life testified last year that she first became concerned about the child's development at her one-year checkup, when she weighed in at 17.6 pounds.

The doctor testified that she asked the mother to keep a journal of what she fed the girl. The mother returned for a follow-up a couple of weeks later but then stopped keeping regular appointments, she

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<http://www.kttn.com/kgofm/modules/news/article.php?storyid=110680>

said. The doctor said she had not seen the child for more than a year when she was taken to the hospital weighing just 12 pounds at the age of 3.

Williams maintained at the hearing last year that the charges against her and Haidle were not justified.

“My daughter has always been small,” she told the judge. “She eats like a horse.”

But the doctor told the court that within two months of the girl being removed from her mother’s care and custody, she had grown 2 inches and put on 15 pounds.