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BABY SITTER PLEADS GUILTY

Admits shaking and then dropping crying tot on head, paralyzing him

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BY MARGARET MCHUGH

Star-Ledger Staff

A Mount Olive baby sitter admitted yesterday that when the infant she was caring for would not stop crying, she shook the child, then dropped him on his head, leaving the 11-month-old paralyzed and blind.

Khac Tam Nguyen, 31, faces up to 10 years in prison for her guilty plea to aggravated assault, and still could be prosecuted for homicide if the baby, Khiem Nguyen, dies.

The Dec. 27, 2007, attack also left the child, who is not related to the defendant, unable to swallow, and he must be fed through a tube in his stomach, clinical social worker Heidi Schleifer said.

Speaking through a Vietnamese language interpreter and answering her attorney's questions, Khac Tam Nguyen admitted that while watching Khiem and her own two small children, she became frustrated at his crying. She said she lifted him up, shook him and then dropped him twice, with him landing on his head. The baby began vomiting and appeared to be having a seizure, and she called 911.

She said she told a dispatcher the baby had suffered a seizure in her Budd Lake apartment, never mentioning the head injuries. She later told investigators she accidentally dropped the child twice while he was having the seizure, but the doctor who treated him said her version was "completely inconsistent" with the child's injuries, according to an arrest affidavit.

The baby's father, Khoi Nguyen, wept quietly as his former baby sitter recounted what she had done. The defendant's husband, Linh Nguyen, also attended the hearing in Morristown.

Authorities had not expected Khiem, who suffered multiple skull fractures, to survive. Khoi Nguyen had to stop working to care for his son, and the family lost their apartment because they couldn't afford the rent, said Richard Pompelio, executive director of the New Jersey Crime Victims' Law Center.

The family had to move in with a relative, but recently got an apartment in Budd Lake, said Schleifer, who works for Progressive Steps, an early intervention provider.

Khac Tam Nguyen had met Khiem's parents at church and had been his baby sitter for about six weeks, authorities said. She also worked a night shift at UPS.

Morris County Assistant Prosecutor Brian DiGiacomo said the state intends to seek a 10-year sentence and Nguyen would have to serve at least eight years and five months before becoming eligible for parole. If Khiem were to die from his injuries, the state "will seek an indictment for homicide," DiGiacomo said.

Schleifer said the baby's family needs furniture, rental assistance and baby clothes. Anyone who would like to contribute can contact Pompelio's office at (973) 729-9342.

Khoi Nguyen had taught math and physics in Vietnam, but began working at a nail salon along with his wife when he moved to the United States in 1998. Next week, he will begin working with Literacy Volunteers of America to learn English so he can become a teacher, Schleifer said.

Pompelio claims the state's Victims of Crime Compensation Office has ignored his requests for financial assistance for the family. Khoi Nguyen is entitled to the wages he lost to stay home to care for his child, said Pompelio, who used to run the agency when it was known as the Victims of Crime Compensation Board.

"I think it's absolutely outrageous," Pompelio said. "The people who run it should be ashamed of themselves." He said such a request in the past would have been approved in a day.

Peter Aseltine, a spokesman for the state Attorney General's Office, said the application is pending.

Superior Court Judge Thomas V. Manahan will sentence Khac Nguyen on Jan. 22.

Margaret McHugh may be reached at mmchugh@starledger.com or (973) 539-7119.

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