

## Scottsburg woman faces 12 neglect, battery counts over child's injuries

Written by Marty Randall

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A two-year-old child's injuries recorded by hospital staff at Kosair Children's Hospital in Louisville have resulted in six Class C felony charges of neglect of a dependent and six charges of Class D felony battery in Scott Circuit Court.

Defendant Vanessa A. Watson, 24, Scottsburg, admitted to committing most of the injuries that the youngster suffered, according to the probable cause affidavit filed by Lt./Detective Mike Nichols of the Scottsburg Police Department.

Det. Nichols received initial reports about possible child abuse from a worker with the Scott County Department of Child Services (DCS). The youngster, he learned, had been taken to Kosair on August 22, and the DCS worker had been called by that hospital staff to document injuries. Bruising on the child's body was noted as well as traumatic alopecia, the intentional pulling out of hair, and a subdural hematoma or bleeding on the brain, coming from a knot on the little girl's head.

Watson's mother reportedly told the DCS worker that the toddler had suffered bruising over the past few weeks and had also been throwing up and "...acting strangely..." since August 16.

When questioned, the child's mother, Ashley Huff, 27, Scottsburg, said her daughter had been lethargic. She also reportedly stated that she had not taken the little girl to a doctor because she was waiting for insurance coverage "...to kick in..." Huff took her toddler to a hospital when she was advised to do so by her mother, the person who found the knot on the child's head and missing hair.

In September, Det. Nichols and the DCS worker talked with Watson, who babysat the child. The affidavit related that Watson told them the child had said her body "hurt." Watson said both she and her husband repeatedly told Huff to take the child to a doctor. Kosair staff said that the toddler had a urinary tract infection which may have been causing fever and other symptoms.

A man who was dating the child's mother reportedly took photos of the little girl's face, which showed bruising.

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Charges against Watson for battery cited spanking the child with a flip flop sandal; striking her on the shin, leaving bruising; grabbing her by her cheeks, thus bruising her face; striking her on the back, causing bruising; grabbing the child by the arm, bruising it; and pulling out the child's hair leaving, according to the charging affidavit, "...a large area of hair loss."

At her initial hearing on Thursday afternoon, January 9, Watson had little to say as Judge Roger Duvall read the charges. He entered a preliminary plea of not guilty for her on all counts and set an initial jury trial date of April 15.

A public defender was to be appointed to help the woman with her defense.

Bail is fixed at \$40,000 corporate surety bond/full cash. Judge Duvall told Watson that a no contact order to protect the child will be entered, which will take effect if Watson is released on bond.

The child's mother, Ashley Huff, also faces a charge of neglect of a dependent, D felony, in Scott Superior Court. She was charged with the offense on January 8 for failing to obtain timely medical help for her daughter.

Huff had not yet appeared for her initial hearing on that charge as of January 10.