

Seeking justice for Amanda; County should cooperate with family to end mystery of young woman's death

 buffalonews.com/news/seeking-justice-for-amanda-county-should-cooperate-with-family-to-end-mystery-of-young-womans/article_6c720ae8-cdd3-5000-8e1a-dbd5f6d1b6b6.html

By Staff

May 12, 2010

Amanda Wienckowski's death has been shrouded in mystery, and only recently is the veil starting to lift. That may not be enough for a family that has had tragedy compounded by a slew of questions concerning the young woman's death.

Authorities must continue to do everything they can to bring some degree of certainty to this investigation. Family attorney Steven M. Cohen has railed against what he perceives as a system that has not fully cooperated with the family by turning over every bit of evidence that could shed light on the death of the 20-year-old, whose body was found stuffed into an East Side garbage tote. Both the medical examiner and Buffalo police insist that the investigation still is open and has been thorough, and that evidence has been shared with the family.

Wienckowski's mother, Leslie Brill, is so convinced that a ruling that the death was caused by an accidental drug overdose is wrong, and that investigators weren't doing enough, that she and her lawyer, who is working pro bono, have taken several trips to the East Side neighborhood where her daughter's body was found to find out what she can. That's something no parent should ever have to do.

The ultimate goal is to have the person who hid Wienckowski's body, or worse, brought to justice, according to Cohen. But before the Buffalo homicide squad can devote more resources to the investigation, the medical examiner's office has to declare it a homicide. Spending a lot of taxpayers' money investigating a case that four forensic pathologists have determined to be an accidental death is difficult to justify -- made even more so by the notion that the medical examiner's office now has to be confronted with evidence it may have missed.

There is some reason for optimism. Dr. Anthony J. Billittier IV, the county's health commissioner, is taking a look at the case, and more answers may result. For the Buffalo Police Department's part, officials maintain the investigation remains active, open and in the hands of homicide detectives.

Wienckowski grew up in Kenmore and was living in Lewiston but, by all accounts, had been drawn into a world of drugs and away from her family. Her remains were found frozen and upside down in a plastic garbage tote outside a Buffalo church on Jan. 9, 2009, a month after she was first reported missing.

A local autopsy determined that she died of an accidental opiate drug overdose, a claim authorities continued to stand by. The family recently made a public denouncement of the findings and pointed to partial results from a second autopsy, one the family commissioned, that found that the January 2009 local autopsy missed some points, not the least of which was an indication that Wienckowski was strangled.

The family also has the voluntary assistance of Dennis A. Delano, a former Buffalo homicide cold-case detective well known for his involvement in the follow-up investigation of the death of 13-year-old Crystallynn Girard, whose mother, Lynn M. DeJac, was cleared after decades and released from jail. Delano has witnessed the second autopsy and offered his years of experience, adding weight to the family's case.

The results of the second autopsy, which cannot be completed without additional body tissue to analyze, deserve careful consideration. Authorities here should provide what help they can. No expert medical opinion, however it is obtained, can be ignored in the search for answers, and justice, in this case.