

Under a cloud in Wienckowski death, man accused of harassing her mother; Garner is arraigned in Tonawanda court

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By Lou Michel

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Antoine J. Garner, the last known person to see Amanda L. Wienckowski alive before her frozen body was discovered in an East Side trash bin more than two years ago, has been charged with harassing the deceased woman's mother.

Garner, 25, whose last known address was in Buffalo, was arraigned Wednesday in Tonawanda City Court on two counts of aggravated harassment for allegedly making threatening statements to Leslie L. Brill.

"I received a Facebook message and a telephone call from him, and he said I have a death wish," Brill said Wednesday. "I'm petrified of him. He was released on his own recognizance, but it took police a year to find him."

Before he was released from custody Wednesday, an order of protection was issued in Tonawanda City Court prohibiting Garner from having any contact with Brill. Garner is scheduled to return to court Tuesday.

Cheektowaga police took Garner into custody earlier this week on an arrest warrant that Tonawanda Detective Joseph Scarpena had obtained after authorities were unable to locate him. Brill resides in Tonawanda and had sought help from police there after Garner allegedly contacted her.

Garner has never been charged in the disappearance and death of Wienckowski, a 20-year-old Kenmore native who had gone to the Spring Street home of his grandmother Dec. 5, 2008, for a paid sexual encounter with him, according to police.

DNA test results have determined that a hair recovered from Wienckowski's body belongs to Garner. DNA from other individuals was also found on the woman's remains.

Buffalo police have suggested that it was possible she may have died from situational asphyxiation during rough sex, but an autopsy by the Erie County medical examiner ruled her death accidental due to a drug overdose.

Brill and other family members adamantly disagreed with the medical examiner and

police, prompting them to obtain a second autopsy, whose long-awaited final results are still pending.

The second autopsy was conducted in February 2010 by West Coast pathologist Silvia O. Comparini. Preliminary results from it indicate that Wienckowski was strangled, according to comments made by attorney Steven M. Cohen, one of the attorneys representing Wienckowski's family.

He also expressed concern about Garner. "He's openly threatened Leslie, and he's expressed rage against Leslie and her legal team," Cohen said of Garner. "I'm surprised he was released on his own recognizance. If we are successful in proving Amanda's death was murder, it is our understanding Antoine Garner is a person of interest in the investigation."

Comparini's final determination has been repeatedly delayed because of protracted legal wrangling over obtaining tissue samples and other evidence that is still in the possession of Erie County.

Relatives and friends of Wienckowski raised money from donations for the second autopsy and hope the final autopsy results will soon be released.

"It has been too long," Brill said. "I'm ashamed to even be part of Erie County at this point. I mean, this is my daughter. Enough is enough."

Cohen said Comparini still has not received all of the material she needs to complete the second autopsy. "The medical examiner has still not gotten the materials to Dr. Comparini that she needs to complete her autopsy," he said. "It's very frustrating."

The DNA identified as belonging to several different people on her daughter's body, Brill has said, serves as proof that Wienckowski was sexually assaulted and murdered.

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