

# New inquiry needed to find out how Wienckowski died

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By Staff

February 1, 2013

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It's long past time to determine how Amanda L. Wienckowski died four years ago.

The 20-year-old was either strangled or died of a drug overdose, depending on which autopsy you believe. That unbelievable discrepancy should be settled by an independent inquiry. Doing so would not only help a grieving family, it would answer questions about how evidence is evaluated in Erie County. Also, if it is determined that she was strangled, a murder investigation can get under way.

Two new experts now dispute the original autopsy results, which listed the cause of death as a drug overdose. A respected out-of-town pathologist says that Wienckowski did not have enough morphine in her blood to cause her death. A local ear, nose and throat specialist says that a fractured bone and broken cartilage in her throat indicate that she was strangled.

Wienckowski's body was found Jan. 9, 2009, upside down in a garbage tote outside a church at Clinton and Spring streets on Buffalo's East Side, across the street from the home of Antoine J. Garner. He was the last person known to have seen her alive and has been described by authorities as "a person of interest" in the death.

Garner is standing trial in an unrelated case in which he is accused of choking and assaulting a prostitute.



Amanda Wienckowski

Then-Medical Examiner Dianne R. Vertes conducted the county autopsy on Wienckowski and determined that the young woman died from an overdose of opiates. Ever since then, family members have been relentless in trying to overturn that verdict. They hired a West Coast pathologist to conduct a second autopsy. That pathologist, Silvia O. Camparini, determined that the young woman had been beaten, raped and strangled before her body was discarded.

Vertes is now the county's chief medical examiner and stands by her original autopsy.

A review last year of the two autopsies by a former Monroe County medical examiner hired by District Attorney Frank A. Sedita III failed to settle the discrepancies and in fact may have muddied the picture even further.

The new information in the case came out of a Common Council Legislation Committee hearing the other day. Chairman Darius G. Pridgen, of the Ellicott District, was critical of the medical examiner for refusing his request to appear at the session, calling it an "arrogant" gesture, given that Wienckowski's survivors were present.

Perhaps Vertes will be persuaded by Erie County Legislature Chairwoman Betty Jean Grant, D-Buffalo, to attend an upcoming County Legislature hearing on the matter.

And as recently reported, an attorney spearheading the Wienckowski family's efforts to get the Medical Examiner's Office to revise the death certificate from an accidental overdose to a homicide said an Albany-area pathologist reviewed the county's autopsy results and found that there was not enough morphine to cause death.

It was more than a year ago that this page said the uncertainty surrounding the death is unacceptable, and that remains the case today. Another autopsy, one that is truly independent, is needed to settle the mystery of how Amanda Wienckowski died.