

Mother leaving children home alone faces charges
Authorities: Woman seen most recently Wednesday

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PLEASANTVILLE - Authorities are looking for a Pleasantville woman who allegedly left her two young children home alone Wednesday.

The children were discovered asleep in the home by their father, who called the Fairfield County Sheriff's Office.

The Lancaster City Prosecutor's Office issued a warrant for two charges of child endangering against Molly Jo Bennett, 29, of Pleasantville, this week. She reportedly was most recently seen by a neighbor as she was leaving her residence Wednesday night, according to the Fairfield County Sheriff's report.

The Fairfield County Child Protective Services has removed the children - a 1-year-old and another whose age was not disclosed - from the home and placed them with relatives, according to the report.

Fairfield County Children's Services Director Rich Bowlen said safety for the children is the No. 1 concern when the agency is contacted by law enforcement.

"Our first choice is always to put the children with relatives if we can't safely maintain the child at the home," Bowlen said.

The two counts of child endangerment are the first issued against the 29-year-old mother, according to Fairfield County Municipal Court documents.

Fairfield County Sheriff's Detective Paul Robberts responded to Bennett's home at 311 N. Main St. around 10:16 a.m. Thursday, according to the sheriff's report.

Bennett's ex-boyfriend and the father of the 1-year-old said he received a telephone call around 10 p.m. Wednesday informing him that his child was alone in the home and that Bennett had just left the residence.

The ex-boyfriend - who declined to comment on the incident Friday - said he went to Bennett's home to see if she was there but was unable to get into the home, according to the report.

The ex-boyfriend then spoke with a neighbor, who said Bennett left the home earlier and the children were inside by themselves.

The ex-boyfriend then notified Bennett's mother, who came to the residence to unlock the door, according to the report. The 1-year-old child was asleep in his crib on the second floor of the house. The second child was found asleep in the living room.

The ex-boyfriend and Bennett's mother did not find Bennett in the home anywhere. The ex-boyfriend then took the 1-year-old to his house and Bennett's mother took the other child to her house, according to the report. Robberts notified Fairfield County Children's Services when he got the call. Then he went to the residence to check out the complaint. He said he couldn't get an answer at the door and couldn't see any movement in the house, according to the report.

Children's Services now is investigating the incident in partnership with the city prosecutor's office, Bowlen said. "We'll work together on doing interviews with all the involved parties to determine the best course of action," Bowlen said. "We don't want to make an independent decision until we talk with everyone who knows the family."

Bowlen said the state mandates the investigation takes less than 30 days, although it might take longer based upon the incident.

Bowlen said Fairfield County Child Protective Services sees its "fair share" of cases in which young children are left home alone.

"Every case ends up being very unique," Bowlen said. "In some cases, the parent does not intend to neglect the child because they were able to find proper day care or something like that. It varies on an individual basis."

Bowlen said seeking action, such as termination of parental rights, in cases such as this wouldn't be a common course of action at this point.

"That's the very last and final thing we would do," Bowlen said. "In a case like this, that is not even on the radar at this point."