

Child Protective Services Innocent plea in infant's death

Manslaughter trial not yet scheduled

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SANTA CRUZ — A 21-year-old foster care provider pleaded innocent to involuntary manslaughter Friday in the death of a baby left in a van for more than four hours.

It was the first court appearance for Laura Herrero, who was recently indicted by the grand jury.

As television cameras filmed her standing before Superior Court Judge Bill Kelsay, Herrero entered her plea and agreed to a Oct. 21 court appearance to set a trial date.

"It's unfortunate," said her attorney, Stephen LaBerge, after the hearing. "I don't think my client should bear any criminal responsibility."

LaBerge described Herrero as "heart-broken" over the death of 11-day-old Cedric Blan.

Investigators said the baby died Aug. 2 of heat exhaustion after being left in a van for more than four hours in front of the Felton home of Jim and Winona Sherrick.

Herrero, the Sherrick's daughter and an employee of the Sherrick's foster home, was caring for the infant at the time, investigators said. She reportedly thought her brother had taken the baby from the van to the house.

The baby allegedly was left in the vehicle from the time Herrero arrived at her parents' home at 1 p.m. until 5:40 p.m., said District Attorney Art Danner.

During that period, temperatures inside the van may have reached as high as 120 degrees, he said.

Prosecutor Christine McGuire said Friday that investigators are still examining what happened during those 4½ hours.

She said Herrero was taking care of about eight children that day.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Laura Herrero in court with attorney Steve LaBerge, left, and prosecutor Christine McGuire.

"It's a real difficult case," McGuire said. "That's why we're taking great pains to investigate it."

Both the District Attorney's Office and the grand jury have proceeded

"slowly and deliberately," she said.

A conviction on an involuntary manslaughter charge carries a maximum penalty of four years in state prison.

Herrero's "whole life has been dedi-

cated to taking care of children," said LaBerge.

Herrero, who is married and the mother of an infant, has been in counseling since the death of Blan, he said.