

Mom pleads guilty to killing disabled son

by Dana Littlefield

SAN DIEGO - A mother accused of neglecting her severely disabled son and causing his death by starvation pleaded guilty Wednesday to involuntary manslaughter and felony child abuse.

Angela Cheral Bernard, 33, of Rolando, Calif., also admitted she personally inflicted great bodily injury on 14-year-old Brandon McClure, causing his death in December 2005.

She could be sentenced to prison for three to 10 years at a San Diego Superior Court hearing scheduled for Sept. 7. She is currently being held in San Diego County Jail without bail.

Bernard was originally charged with murder after her Jan. 4 arrest, but prosecutors dropped that charge Wednesday under the terms of a plea bargain. Had she been convicted of murder, Bernard could have been sent to prison for 25 years to life.

Deputy District Attorney James Koerber said at a previous court hearing that Bernard called 911 on Dec. 17, 2005, to report her son's death. The prosecutor said a Dec. 30 autopsy revealed that Brandon's body weighed only 28 pounds and had skin ulcers with protruding bone.

Koerber said Bernard was contacted repeatedly by Child Protective Services over several years regarding Brandon and his two sisters.

The boy, who was born with cerebral palsy, required 24-hour care and was unable to walk or speak, the prosecutor said.

Brandon was once removed from his mother's custody after authorities noticed a second-degree burn on his foot and Bernard couldn't explain how it got there, Koerber said. Later, the boy was returned to his mother.

In April 2005, authorities reported finding no food in the home and determined that most of Brandon's care was provided by his 12-year-old sister.

Bernard was not accused of harming her other two children.

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