

Cellmate: Man accused in death of boy, 2, said he 'did everybody a favor'

By **DAVE FOPAY, Staff Writer**
dfopay@jg-tc.com

CHARLESTON — A jail cellmate of a man accused of causing the injuries that killed a 2-year-old boy claimed the man said he “did everybody a favor.”

That was part of police testimony during a court hearing Thursday at which Jamie L. Thomasson was ordered to stand trial for allegedly causing the death of Holden A. Jones, the son of Thomasson’s girlfriend. Charleston police Detective Jim Blagg also testified that an autopsy indicated that Holden died because of “very violent shaking or very violently being thrown.”

Thomasson, 29, of Springfield is charged with first-degree murder and aggravated battery of a child for allegedly injuring Holden on June 20. Blagg said Thomasson stayed part of the time with Amy Bennett, Holden’s mother, at her Charleston residence on Union Street and was baby-sitting Holden when the boy died.

Thomasson’s attorneys entered a not-guilty plea to the charges on his behalf after Circuit Judge Teresa Righter ruled that Blagg’s testimony was sufficient to link Thomasson to a possible crime. Righter didn’t schedule a trial but set a hearing for Aug. 4 to review the status of the case.

Blagg testified Thursday that about a week after Holden’s death and Thomasson’s arrest, he interviewed John Gilmore, a jail cellmate of Thomasson’s. Blagg said Gilmore notified authorities about Thomasson’s repeatedly referring to Holden by a vulgarity that meant he thought the boy wasn’t tough enough, Blagg said.

According to Gilmore, Thomasson also said he “did everybody a favor” because Holden’s death meant Bennett would no longer have to associate with Jason Jones, Holden’s father, Blagg also said. He added that Gilmore also claimed Thomasson threatened to harm Bennett if she didn’t support him and also threatened State’s Attorney Steve Ferguson, who’s prosecuting the case.

The autopsy showed that Holden’s collarbone was broken in a way indicating that his arm was grabbed and jerked violently, Blagg said during Ferguson’s questioning, while brain contusions and other injuries indicated “severe shaking.”

Both Thomasson and Bennett told officers Holden was “fussy” when Bennett left

him with Thomasson while she went to work, the detective continued.

When Thomasson was questioned, he first said Holden fell out of bed but later said he was "playing rough" with the boy, used a wrestling move and threw him onto an air mattress several times, Blagg related. Thomasson said Holden at one point bounced off the mattress and hit his head on a nearby piece of furniture, he said.

Thomasson said he tried to revive Holden a few times overnight, which included shaking him, but found him dead the next morning, according to Blagg.

During his cross examination, defense attorney Mark Wykoff referred to Gilmore as a "jailhouse snitch," but Blagg said Gilmore didn't ask for anything in return for his account of what Thomasson told him.

The doctor who did the autopsy didn't say anything about whether any of Holden's injuries could have come from bouncing off a mattress as Thomasson claimed, Blagg said in response to a question from Wykoff. But the doctor did say falling out of bed couldn't have led to injuries so extensive, the detective added.

Thomasson is jailed without bond, and a conviction for either offense with which he's charged would require prison time.

Ferguson also drafted the charges against Thomasson to include allegations that the acts were "exceptionally brutal or heinous," and that Thomasson was an adult who killed a child younger than 12.

Those are factors a jury would have to find if Thomasson were to receive a sentence beyond the normal maximum. For the murder charge, for instance, Thomasson could receive a life sentence or more than the usual 60-year maximum if he's convicted and a jury finds that the extenuating factors apply.

Contact Dave Fopay at dfopay@jg-tc.com or 238-6858.

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