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## LOCAL

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### **Officials wonder: Could murder of Sunrise girl have been prevented?**

By John Holland and Macollvie Jean-François | South Florida Sun-Sentinel

Abandoned by people who should have protected her — a sex-offender mother, a father who never paid child support — Jada Woodson likely remained unknown to the state agents who could have protected her.

Until someone killed her.

The 2-year-old girl who escaped official notice during her life has sparked scrutiny from Miami to Tallahassee with her brutal death Monday. The state Department of Children & Families is double-checking files for any dealings with Jada or her accused killer, caretaker Tyra L. Williams; child advocates are monitoring the case; and Sunrise police detectives are gathering evidence

Williams, 29, is charged with murder, sexual battery and possession of cocaine after bringing Jada's lifeless body to Westside Regional Hospital Monday night. Sunrise police records show Williams waited almost two hours before seeking help for the little girl, calling friends but refusing to dial 911 or call an ambulance.

Jada died of multiple skull fractures and had also been sexually abused, the Sunrise police report said. Williams is being held without bail and a second child under her care has been placed in state protective custody.

"We have a lot of checking to do to see if there was anything we could have done to prevent this, but so far there's no reason to believe we had ever been notified about Jada. In fact, the records show we haven't," said Jack Moss, DCF's regional administrator in South Florida. "This is going to be a complete examination and we may want to look at all procedures to see if anything should be changed."

Unlike other high-profile child deaths that raise the question of state oversight, this one has not drawn an immediate outcry from normally tough critics of the agency. Attorney Howard Talenfeld, president of Florida's Children First, said he's reserving judgment, adding that more time is needed to sort through a complex and murky case.

The court files and police records do make one thing perfectly clear: Little Jada Woodson never had much of a chance.

Her biological mother, Melanie Gertrude Townsend, sits in a maximum security prison, a convicted sex offender with a long history of drug abuse and arrests. Townsend's three older children, Jada's siblings, were taken by the state years ago.

Townsend was out of jail briefly when she gave Jada to Tyra Williams about 18 months ago, and Williams was in the process of seeking court approval for complete custody, DCF officials said.

The question still unanswered is whether the agency could have stepped in and saved Jada.

According to court records, Williams had custody and was receiving child support for two children who didn't belong to her, Jada and 19-month-old Ashanti Thomas. Williams took custody of Ashanti about a year ago when the baby's mother relinquished custody and was in the process of gaining full custody, according to court records and DCF officials. But when Williams filed for a restraining order against a former boyfriend in September 2006, she wrote that she had only one child, never mentioning Jada.

In July, DCF investigators in Miami-Dade responded to a state abuse hot line report about domestic violence between Williams and her boyfriend Eppic "Eddie" Ingraham, Moss said. Agents responded but did not find any children in the Miami home and did not investigate further, Moss said.

Court records show Williams claimed to have addresses in Fort Lauderdale, Sunrise and Opa-locka. She was at the Sunrise address Monday when Jada died.

According to police reports, Williams called two friends Monday night, telling them Jada was not moving and appeared badly injured. She refused pleas from her friends to 911 call and one of the friends, Tonya Thomas, drove from Miami to Sunrise and brought Jada to the hospital.

After Williams was arrested, she admitted hiding blood-stained baby clothes on the way to the hospital, detectives said.

Staff Researcher Barbara Hijek contributed to this report.

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