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NEWS RELEASE

June 12, 2014

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Hibbing man admits to causing baby's death

A Hibbing man accused of causing the death of his former girlfriend's 2-year-old daughter in 2012 pleaded guilty today to first-degree manslaughter.

Russell Shannon Johnson, 27, entered the guilty plea before Judge James Florey in St. Louis County District Court in Virginia. The defendant admitted that he caused the child's death while committing or attempting to commit malicious punishment.

The case against Johnson was developed by Virginia police and the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension after a more than two-year investigation into the March 22, 2012, death of Caroline Shenze Marie Medicine-Chavez.

The investigation resulted in the defendant being charged last August with second-degree murder, while committing the felony offense of malicious punishment of a child. A trial had been scheduled for this October before the plea agreement was reached. Under terms of the agreement, the defendant will serve a sentence within the parameters of the Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines. St. Louis County prosecutor Michelle Anderson will argue to the court for the maximum guideline sentence.

The court ordered an Arrowhead Regional Corrections probation officer to conduct a pre-sentence investigation of Johnson's background before sentencing which is scheduled for July 9, 2015, at 10:00 a.m.

"The plea agreement is an appropriate outcome to a difficult case," prosecutor Anderson said.

"The agreement was reached after careful consideration of the evidence, and consultation with expert witnesses, law enforcement, and Caroline's family and friends. On behalf of the St. Louis County Attorney's Office, I commend the persistence of Caroline's loved ones and the community in bringing forth awareness of the injustice of her tragic death, the courage of the witnesses who provided evidence invaluable to the prosecution of this case, and the vigilance of the medical examiner, Dr. Uncini, members of the Virginia Police Department and the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension throughout the investigation. The agreement reached ensures the

defendant will be held accountable for the death of a defenseless child. It is my hope Caroline's family will be able to turn their focus to healing as a family. This tragedy and their love for Caroline will stay with them far beyond defendant's sentence."

Police reports indicated that officers were called to a Virginia residence on a report of a 2-year-old girl who was unresponsive at 9:11 a.m. on March 21, 2012. An officer found the girl gasping for air in an upstairs bedroom. The girl was first taken to a Virginia hospital and then transported to a Duluth hospital where she was pronounced dead.

St. Louis County Medical Examiner Dr. Thomas Uncini performed an autopsy and determined that the child died from "closed head trauma." He specifically noted the presence on the girl of skin and subcutaneous contusions, which varied in age, a subdural hematoma which occurred around the time of her collapse, and the presence of a retinal hemorrhage in her left eye. The manner of her death remained under investigation.

A break in the case occurred last July when a woman told Virginia police and Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension investigators of a conversation she said she had with Johnson. She said that the defendant told her he had stayed up late the night before the girl's death. He said he was "cranky," and the girl was a "really whiny kid." He said the girl got into his face and he pushed her and she flew into a wall and hit her head. He said she was unresponsive. The witness said Johnson cried as he related the story and told her how much it was weighing on his mind.

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