

## DSS to seek custody of 5-year-old girl

The Boston Globe

### Was found in squalor in South Boston

By Megan Woolhouse, Globe Staff | September 21, 2008

Department of Social Services officials said yesterday they will seek permanent custody in court tomorrow of a 5-year-old girl who was found living with her family in squalid conditions inside a South Boston home Friday.

The girl's life inside the garbage-strewn home remained a mystery yesterday. Her very existence seemed to surprise neighbors.

Robert McAloonis, a next-door neighbor of many years, said he knew the owner of the home and had only seen a child there once.

"She was just sitting in the [upstairs] window," he said yesterday. "She was just looking out."

The problems came to light on Fri day, after the Boston Fire Department received a call from the residents of 112 Tudor St. complaining that a strange odor had seeped into their basement and was making them light-headed and dizzy.

The listed owner of the home is Mary Ryan, 78, who fire officials said is the grandmother of the little girl. Officials said the other residents were Ryan's son and daughter, ages 40 and 41, but they did not disclose their names.

Firefighters detected high levels of carbon monoxide in the home, whose condition shocked them. The little girl was naked and filthy with feces, living amid tall piles of trash and bottles of urine. The house was full of cobwebs and without power or running water.

"The firefighters said it was pretty nasty," spokesman Steve MacDonald said. "There were rodents inside."

Boston police spokesman James Kenneally said yesterday that the case remains under investigation and that no charges have been filed.

McAloonis said the family grew increasingly reclusive in recent years, living "like hermits" after Mary Ryan's husband, Thomas, died almost 10 years ago. McAloonis said Thomas Ryan went by the nickname "Den," and was a war veteran and longshoreman who inherited the house from his mother. Many years ago, he renovated the house and for years it was in "pristine" condition, McAloonis said. According to city death records, Thomas Ryan died in 1997.

Neighbors have said they have seen ambulances go to the house to take Mary Ryan to the hospital in recent years and she always waited for them on her front stoop.

The girl and the three adults living in the home were taken to the hospital for evaluation Friday. An official with knowledge of the investigation said the child's mother remained hospitalized yesterday. The official confirmed that the girl's name is Isabella.

City workers boarded up the downstairs windows of the home on Friday and Boston building inspectors declared it unfit for human habitation. Mary Ryan has received a summons to appear at 11 a.m. on Tuesday to answer at least 10 citations of health and building code violations. City officials did not return phone calls yesterday, but said Friday that their office had no history of problems at the address.

There were few outward signs of problems at the home yesterday. The tan house with a blue awning sits amid tidy condominiums with window boxes. Some neighbors have said the home emitted a rancid smell, but no such odor was in evidence yesterday. Other neighbors said stray cats often visited the house because Ryan left them food on her back porch.

Neighbor Julie O'Malley said yesterday she had no idea a 5-year-old girl lived in the house until she heard it on news reports.

She said she never saw a child playing in the yard or heard a child crying inside the home, an oddity in a neighborhood where houses are packed in together. O'Malley, a nurse at Children's Hospital, moved across the street from 112 Tudor just six weeks ago.

"I'm horrified a child was living there," she said. "Fortunately she's in a safe environment now."

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