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Documents detail dead Fla. girl's troubled life

By KELLI KENNEDY

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — For years, teachers, a doctor and a nurse noticed the little girl was always hungry and sometimes stole food from school. She missed doctor's appointments. She once had a bruise on her chin.

Then in 2005 came the most disturbing sign of trouble, an accusation she had been touched inappropriately, according to documents released Monday by the Department of Children and Families. The case was closed because it was unclear if the girl was referring to her foster father or her biological dad, who had been previously charged with sexually molesting her.

The documents detailed a string of allegations that were dismissed by child welfare authorities, but they also show dozens of caseworker notes that said the children were happy, clean and doing well in school.

The girl, Nubia Doctor, was found in her adoptive father's pesticide truck last week, wrapped in plastic and doused with a toxic chemical, authorities said. Her brother was in the front seat, critically injured after authorities said his father poured a chemical on him.

Child welfare officials have told The Associated Press that Jorge Barahona said he starved the 10-year-old girl to death, though no one has been charged in her death.

Barahona has pleaded not guilty to attempted first-degree murder and aggravated child abuse for allegedly pouring chemicals on Nubia's twin brother, who remains hospitalized with severe burns. Officials said they also expect charges to be filed against their mother, Carmen Barahona.

Telephone messages and e-mails left for Jorge and Carmen Barahona's attorneys were not immediately returned Monday.

The sexual abuse allegation came from a psychologist who said Nubia told him her then-foster father often touched her inappropriately, an accusation he denied. Nubia recanted her statement and officials closed the case.

A handful of other allegations came. Nubia once was afraid to go home after getting in trouble for falling asleep in class. "According to principal, Nubia seems to be threatened or scared of her foster mom," the report said.

The most recent accusation claimed the Barahonas bound Nubia and her brother, Victor, by their hands and feet and locked them in the bathroom.

A tip about that alleged abuse Feb. 10 set off a futile four-day search for Jorge Barahona and the twins. DCF finally called police Feb. 14, the same day authorities found Nubia and Victor in the truck along Interstate 95.

Jorge Barahona told police he loaded his dead daughter into the truck, got into the pickup with his son and planned to kill himself, according to court documents.

Nubia's death has reignited criticism against the state Department of Children and Families, an agency that overhauled its system a decade ago after a foster child was missing for more than a year before anyone realized.

Nubia's life was difficult from the start. Her biological mother admitted to using drugs when the twins were born in 2000 and they were homeless for the first part of their life before family friends took them in.

Nubia was born with both male and female parts, a medical condition that would require countless surgeries and medication, a doctor said. Friends teased her.

Her mother "yells and screams at Nubia. Mom tells Nubia she hates her," according to a 2004 abuse report. The twins were later removed from her custody and lived with their biological father, who had a history of drug abuse.

They were put in foster care when he was charged in 2004 with sexually molesting Nubia. The documents didn't say whether he was convicted.

A few months after the twins moved in with Jorge and Carmen Barahona, a nurse noted that Carmen Barahona never took Nubia to her doctor's appointments and just sends her on a medical bus.

"This child is very medically needy and should not be missing appointments because the foster parent does not want to take her," the report said.

In 2006, Nubia had 17 absences from school in a three-month period. She was eventually home schooled.

The children were adopted in 2008.

In 2007, a teacher said Nubia "smells rotten" and was hoarding food in her backpack.

"Nubia is always hungry and eats a lot at school. Nubia is afraid to talk," the report said.

Investigators talked to the Barahonas, a speech therapist and the twins — everything seemed OK, according to the documents. The Barahonas said one of the side effects of Nubia's medical condition was a strong odor.

The head of a children's advocacy group slammed the state agency. Florida's Children First Executive Director Christina Spudeas asked why "cries to the Florida Abuse Hotline were dismissed and not competently, completely and urgently investigated before the kids met their tragic fates."

DCF Secretary David Wilkins has asked for an outside review of the case.