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Detroit 911 Operators Arraigned on Willful Neglect Charges

By David Runk, Associated Press Writer

DETROIT (AP) – A pair of 911 operators who authorities say didn't respond appropriately when a 5-year-old boy called to say his mother had collapsed were arraigned Friday on charges of willful neglect of duty.

Judge Jimmylee Gray entered not-guilty pleas for Sharon Nichols 43, and Terri Sutton, 47, who appeared during the brief hearing in 36th District Court.

Both remain free after the judge set a \$50,000 personal bond. A pretrial hearing was scheduled for July 12.

The women declined to comment afterward. Their lawyers told Gray that the operators had been suspended from their jobs.

But police said Friday that they didn't have any updated information on possible disciplinary action. On Wednesday, police said disciplinary action could range from suspension without pay to termination.

Outside the courthouse, Nichols' lawyer Cornelius Pitts said it appears the charges were brought to please the public. Since the tapes first were made public in April, the case has drawn national media attention.

"She indeed is hanging in there notwithstanding the stressful circumstances that surround her," Pitts said of Nichols.

Nichols and Sutton were charged Wednesday with the misdemeanor in connection with two calls placed Feb. 20 by Robert Turner, who is now 6. Robert tried to tell operators that his mother had collapsed, but both operators apparently did not take him seriously.

In the second call, an operator prosecutors identified as Sutton scolded Robert for playing on the phone. Prosecutors said the operators wrongly assumed that the call was a prank and didn't treat it as an emergency.

"This woman has committed no wrongdoing whatsoever and certainly nothing of a criminal nature," said Sutton's lawyer, David Lee.

When police finally arrived at the house three hours after Robert's first call, 46-year-old Sherrill Turner was dead.

Personal injury lawyer Geoffrey Fieger, who is best known for defending assisted-suicide advocate Jack Kevorkian, has filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the city on behalf of the family.

Fieger said Robert's mother, who had an enlarged heart, would have survived if help had been sent immediately.

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