

Child in hospital after dog attack

By **Jonathan Overstreet** | *Staff Writer*

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A 2-year-old Augusta boy was still in the hospital Saturday after being mauled by several dogs Friday night.

According to a Richmond County sheriff's report, the boy's mother, Jessica Chavous, of the 3600 block of Belair Road, told officers her son Damien had climbed the fence to a neighbor's backyard where there were several dogs. The dogs bit Damien many times before his great-uncle rescued him about 8:40 p.m.

Damien was taken to Medical College of Georgia Hospital and was in critical condition Saturday night, said MCG spokeswoman Denise Parrish.

Diane Downs, the director of Augusta Animal Services, said the child was attacked by four dogs.

She said the owner, Shirley Andres Barnes, told her she had moved to Belvedere but had been returning every day to feed the dogs. Two other dogs in a fenced-in area in the front yard were not part of the mauling, Ms. Downs said.

Bill Swint, Damien's great-grandfather child and owner of their Belair Road home, said Saturday that his neighbor had been taking in stray animals for years. He said at one point, she had kept at least 15 dogs in her yard.

The fence between the properties is 4 feet high, and he thinks the dogs might have pulled the toddler over the fence.

He said the boy was bitten on his legs, arms, neck, shoulders and face.

Ms. Downs said animal control has visited Ms. Barnes' house several times in the past to remove animals.

Animal control officers took five of the dogs away Friday. One of the dogs in the front yard escaped. Animal control has not decided what will happen to the dogs, Ms. Downs said.

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