



Family members say murder charges against pit bull owners not justified

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**Reported
by: Craig
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The parents of a Suffolk boy killed by a pit bull in October face charges of child abuse, manslaughter, and second-degree murder.

A Suffolk grand jury returned the indictments Wednesday against James Jonathan Martin, age 29, and Heather Renee Frango, 25. Both were already being held in the Tidewater Regional Jail on other charges.

At a court hearing Thursday, Martin and Frango were each assigned a public defender. The judge scheduled their arraignment for January 5th.

Lieutenant Debbie George, a Suffolk police spokeswoman, said both are being held without bond.

The pair's two-year-old son Jonathan was attacked in his home in the 6000 blk. of Whaleyville Blvd. on October 3 by the family's pit bull. Jonathan later died at Sentara Norfolk General Hospital. The cause of death was blood loss.



Suffolk PD

James Jonathan Martin
(top) and Heather
Frango

The dogs involved in this case are being held at the Suffolk Animal Shelter. Police say the animals are expected to be euthanized after the court process is completed.

Jonathan Martin had been bitten on his face, arms, and legs by the pit bull.

Relatives of the defendants say the charges against the couple are too harsh.

"I think they're a little ridiculous. I can see child neglect... abuse, but second degree murder, involuntary manslaughter? Come, on get off of it," said James Martin, Jonathan's grandfather.

He says the last few months have been overwhelming, but he blames his daughter-in-law Heather Frango, who he says was taking care of little Jonathan that morning, and went back to bed.

"If my grandson had never been left alone that morning by his mother with a box of cereal, he would be alive today, there's no doubt in my mind."

Frango's family also believes something went terribly wrong that morning, but believe the 25-year-old mother has already been through enough.

"Finding your child on the floor dead, or halfway dead, that's punishment enough. I think it's way too much," said Lisa Galindo, Frango's sister.

"She regrets maybe not staying down there 10 minutes longer or not walking into this room, whatever she did wrong, that could have been changed I'm sure she regrets it," said Galindo.

Phil Ferguson, Suffolk's Commonwealth's Attorney, said parents have a responsibility to protect their

children. "We're talking about in this case a two-year-old child who has no way to defend himself, and relies completely on the actions of his parents."

The family had owned its two two pit bull-mix dogs, along with four puppies for a year and a half. Ox had been a stray, police added.

Police told 13News Ox had nipped Jonathan a few months ago, leaving a small mark. They also said neither dog was licensed and neither were vaccinated for rabies.



Charlie Hatfield, 13News

Ox is a pit bull mix.

A neighbor, Brandy Maine, told 13News, "I heard them arguing and all about how they let the dog in this morning and they shouldn't have because it was a stray."

There were no witnesses to the attack, so we may never know what happened in the final minutes leading up to it. But it's left behind emotional families, and two parents behind bars, and some wonderful memories of a little boy taken much too soon.

Not long after the attack, the family's house was condemned. City code officials shut it down because of maintenance problems like chipping paint, broken windows and a broken septic tank which was found to be oozing waste.

Online at: http://www.wvec.com/news/local/stories/wvec_local_121405_suffolk_dog_bite_folo.c9463b5.html