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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FIRST-DEGREE MURDER CHARGE ADDED AGAINST AUSTIN STEVENS IN DEATH OF 10-MONTH-OLD DAUGHTER



AUSTIN STEVENS

LOWER PROVIDENCE TOWNSHIP, Pa. (Dec. 1, 2020) — Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin R. Steele and Lower Providence Township Police Chief Michael Jackson announce the addition of First-Degree, Second-Degree and Third-Degree Murder charges against Austin Stevens, 29, of the 3400 block of Germantown Pike, following the coroner's ruling that the death of 10-month-old Zara Scruggs was homicide.

"The Coroner's Office's ruling that this 10-month-old baby's death was homicide confirms what our investigation showed: Zara died a deeply disturbing death at the hands of her father. Stevens will have to answer to murder charges," said DA Steele. Lower Providence Police responded to a 911 call for an unresponsive infant at 10:40 p.m. on Oct. 3, 2020 at a residence on Germantown Pike. Police arrived and immediately began CPR on the unresponsive baby, who was transported by ambulance to Einstein Medical Center Montgomery, where, despite resuscitation efforts, she was pronounced dead at 12:12 a.m. On Oct. 4, 2020, an autopsy on the infant was conducted by Dr. Frederick Hellman, a forensic pathologist with the Montgomery County Coroner's Office. Dr. Hellman determined that Zara Scruggs was the victim of a sexual assault, sustaining anal rectal trauma and blunt force trauma to the head. The coroner's office ordered additional forensic tests. This week, Dr.

Hellman finalized the cause of death as blunt force head trauma and the manner of death was homicide.

A joint investigation into the baby's death by Lower Providence Police and Montgomery County Detectives found the defendant and the baby were the only people in the residence at the time of death. A download of the defendant's phone found that he had conducted multiple Google searches for nearly an hour before calling 911 with subjects that included "If baby stop breathing," "What if you don't hear baby heart or beat," "My baby isn't breathing," and "How do you know if a bsby is dead." Stevens also conducted social media and text conversations with two women during this time that were not related to the baby's condition. Detectives recovered the bloody diaper that was worn by the baby when she was transported to the hospital.

Charges of First-Degree Murder, Second-Degree Murder and Third-Degree Murder were added to the charges Stevens is facing, which included Involuntary Deviant Sexual Intercourse, Rape of a Child, Aggravated Assault, Aggravated Indecent Assault and Endangering the Welfare of a Child. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for 1 p.m., today, Dec. 1, 2020 on all charges. At that time, prosecutors will move to revoke bail as there is no bail available for First-Degree Murder charges. Stevens has been in the Montgomery County Correctional Facility since his original arrest date.

The case will be prosecuted by First Assistant District Attorney Edward F. McCann, Jr. and Assistant Chief of Trials Brianna Ringwood, who oversees the Family Protection Unit.

Approved for release:

Kevin R. Steele

CRIMINAL CHARGES, AND ANY DISCUSSION THEREOF, ARE MERELY ALLEGATIONS AND ALL DEFENDANTS ARE PRESUMED INNOCENT UNTIL AND UNLESS PROVEN GUILTY.