

## CRIME

# Mother of newborn girl whose body was found in New Jersey park on Christmas Eve in 1984 has been identified and charged

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The mother of a newborn girl whose body was found in a New Jersey park on Christmas Eve nearly 40 years ago has been identified and is now charged in the death, authorities announced Thursday.

The infant, dubbed "Baby Mary" by a police chaplain, was found by two young boys in a secluded park in Mendham Township in 1984, Morris County Prosecutor Robert Carroll said. The child's umbilical cord was still attached when she was found, and she was wrapped inside a towel inside of a plastic bag. She was alive when she was abandoned, Carroll said.

The woman, who was 17 at the time, was arrested in South Carolina on April 24 and charged as a juvenile with manslaughter. She is not in custody but is "being monitored," Carroll said.

The woman's name was not released since she was a juvenile when the death occurred. The identity of the child's father - who was 19 at the time - was also determined, Carroll said, but authorities said he was unaware the baby had been born and he was not involved in her death. He died in 2009.

A possible motive or reason for abandoning the baby has not been disclosed.

A breakthrough in the case came several years ago when a DNA match between the infant and the father was made, Carroll said, though he declined further comment.

"The death and abandonment of this baby girl is a tragic loss and even after nearly 40 years, remains just as heartbreaking," Carroll said in a statement. "Justice may not take the form the public has imagined all these years, but we believe with this juvenile delinquency complaint, justice is being served for Baby Mary. Nothing can right this terrible wrong."

At the time of the newborn's death, New Jersey did not have a safe haven law that allows parents to anonymously surrender a newborn baby at a hospital, police station or fire station. The Safe Haven Infant Protection Act became law in the state in 2000.

"I want young parents to know that there is help available," Sheriff James Gannon said. "If the baby appears to be 30 days old or less, and free of any abuse or neglect, the baby will be accepted with no questions asked."

"Baby Mary" is buried at St. Joseph's Church in Mendham Township.

"Every Christmas Eve for the past 35 years members of our department and community have left their own families at noon to remember Baby Mary at a service by her grave, to ensure she is never forgotten," Mendham Township Police Chief Ross Johnson said. "Today we are finally able to bring closure to this case and the community that has supported her."