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Hightstown Woman Charged with Killing Family Dog

HIGHTSTOWN – A 19-year-old Hightstown woman was charged last week with killing her family's nine-year-old mixed breed dog.

Michelle Wankoff (DOB 6.19.96), age 19, is charged with one count of third-degree animal cruelty, one count of fourth-degree animal cruelty, one count of fourth-degree tampering with evidence, one count of third-degree possession of weapons for an unlawful purpose and one count of fourth-degree unlawful possession of weapons. Her bail was set at \$25,000.

The charges are the result of a joint investigation by the Hightstown Police Department and the New Jersey Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) Humane Police. Hightstown police notified the state SPCA police after receiving a tip that Wankoff had bragged about killing and burying the dog, and a joint investigation ensued.

The investigation revealed that on or about July 21, Wankoff attempted to poison "Chuck" with various medications. When that failed, she hit the animal repeatedly about the head with a shovel and claw hammer until he died. After storing Chuck's body in a small refrigerator in her bedroom for a few days, she buried the dog in a shallow grave that was discovered by Hightstown police and SPCA police in the woods near Wankoff's home on July 25. State examiners will conduct a necropsy to determine the manner of death.

Tyler Phernamucq (DOB 1.27.96), of Hamilton, a friend of Wankoff's, was issued a summons for tampering with evidence for his role in assisting Wankoff with burying the dog.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant Prosecutor Cynthia Liccardo.

Despite having been charged, all persons are presumed innocent until found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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