

# LOCAL & STATE

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## COURTS



CHARLES TRAINOR JR./MIAMI HERALD STAFF  
**ACQUITTED:** Watson Dorval, accused of fatally beating his girlfriend's baby, is found not guilty.

## Man accused in child's killing is acquitted

BY DAVID OVALLE  
 dovalle@miamiherald.com

Jurors late Friday acquitted a Liberty City man who was accused of savagely beating a 5-month-old baby to death more than five years ago.

Watson Dorval, 29, was accused of felony murder and aggravated child abuse in the killing of Jazira Darien, the son of his girlfriend Sabrina Darien.

"It was the right verdict," said Dorval's lawyer, Herb Smith. "They're two people who could have harmed this child, and the jury was not convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that it was this man and only this man. There was a window of opportunity for the mother to have beaten the child — plus the baby had pre-existing injuries."

Authorities were called to their home in the 1300 block of Northwest 77th Terrace in October 2008 because the boy had trouble breathing. An autopsy revealed that Jazira died of blunt force trauma. There were injuries to the ribs, skull fractures and brain hemorrhaging.

"Then there was the liver. The killing injury. It looked like it had been through a blender," prosecutor Tammy Forrest told jurors on Friday.

At the time, the case was another black eye for the Florida Department of Children and Families, which has and continues to be marred by the deaths



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**FINAL STATEMENT:** State prosecutor Jonathan Borst delivers his closing arguments on Friday.

of children who have had contact with the agency.

The month before the boy's death, child welfare investigators removed Sabrina Darien's older child, a severely disabled 8-year-old boy, from her care but left Jazira and three other children at the home.

"The other children," DCF records noted, "appeared to be fine."

At the time, the agency knew Dorval was a "frequent visitor" to the home, but he declined to be fingerprinted for a criminal background check. He had, in fact, been arrested six times since 2003 on charges ranging from grand theft and assault to drug possession.

Prosecutors built their circumstantial case on the belief that Dorval, who was not the boy's father, was the only adult home alone at the time.

During several interviews, Dorval gave shifting versions of what happened: that the baby drowned, that hospital care killed him, that Sabrina Darien was to blame. Finally, he admitted to doing drugs and not remembering what happened, prosecutors said.

Dorval also hid from police and gave officers a fake name.

"He's panicked because he's a murderer of a 5-month-old little baby," said Forrest, who tried the case with Jonathan Borst.

Defense attorneys Herb Smith and Antonio Valiente shifted the blame to Sabrina Darien, and accused Miami-Dade police detectives of ignoring her as a suspect. "They decided after almost zero investigation that it was Mr. Dorval and they worked backward," Valiente said.