Beat: News

Nationwide manhunt launched for missing Md. girl;s dad wanted for murder

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USPA News - A nationwide manhunt was launched Friday for a Maryland man accused of taking his 11-year-old daughter and killing the child`s mother amid a custody battle, officials said on Friday. It is believed the suspect may have taken the child out of state.

Maryland State Police issued an Amber Alert at 10:46 a.m. local time on Thursday when Caitlyn Virts, age 11, was discovered missing from her Dundalk home after the apparent murder of her mother, 36-year-old Bobbi Jo Cortez. The alert was later expanded to include West Virginia and North Carolina. On Friday, authorities in Maryland issued an arrest warrant for Caitlyn`s father, Timothy Howard Virts, in connection with Cortez`s death and the girl`s disappearance. Police fear that Caityln may be in extreme danger, as her father was not supposed to have contact with the child. The Baltimore County Police Department (BCoPD) said investigators believe Virts "may be armed and that he is dangerous." The manhunt went nationwide on Friday after local searches in Maryland prompted no new leads, and police said Virts may have taken the child out of state. Firefighters and Baltimore County Police Department officers arrived at the Cortez home in Dundalk on Thursday morning after someone within the home reported a cardiac arrest at approximately 9:13 a.m. local time. First responders found Cortez in her bedroom with multiple cut wounds to her upper body. At around the same time, police discovered that Timothy and Caitlyn Virts were both missing, along with a black 1999 Dodge Durango in which they may be traveling. Caitlyn`s twin sister and a boy, who were also in the house, were both safe. The amber alert for Caitlyn was issued at 10:46 a.m. local time. Police have not discussed a possible motive for the murder and abduction, but WBAL-TV reported on Friday that a custody hearing regarding the children was set to take place this week. Virts was reportedly afraid that he would be unable to see the children again. Chief Jim Johnson, of the Baltimore County Police Department, urged citizens in a written statement on Thursday to continue to search for Caitlyn and report any information of her whereabouts to the police. "Her safe return is the priority," Johnson said. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the United States Marshal`s Office, the Maryland State Police, and other law enforcement agencies throughout the region are involved in the case.

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