

LOCAL 10X06

INSIDE
B8
B13
Television
Death notices

EW HAVEN REGISTER

www.nhregister.com

THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 2006

Girl, 15, charged in false rape accusation

By Michael Gannon
Register Staff

WEST HAVEN — A 15-year-old girl was arrested Wednesday, charged with herself accusing a cab driver of attempted rape last month.

The girl, who was not identified, was charged with falsely reporting an incident and sixth-degree larceny, according to Officer Angelo Moscatto.

Oliveri Ounba-Payne of Hamden was arrested May 8 after the girl ran from his cab on West Spring Street. She approached a police officer, saying Ounba-Payne had tried to rape her in the back of the cab he drives for Metro

Taxi: Charges against him were dismissed in Superior Court in Milford May 23 after police determined the girl's claim was a hoax.

After the arrest, Detective Tammy Murray followed up on her investigation. Moscatto said "During her investigation, she discovered some inconsistencies in the 15-year-old's story."

Moscatto said further investigation led Murray to believe that the girl had fabricated most of the story.

"We had to continue the investigation to see if she was falsely reporting the story or if her perception was just different than the cab driver's," he said.

Police believe the girl was attempting to beat a cab fare of about \$20. The girl was arrested on a warrant Wednesday afternoon and is being held at a juvenile facility.

New Haven lawyer Tara Knight, who defended Ounba-Payne, was at once grateful and outraged at the outcome. "I was aware this was coming," she said. "I knew detectives were continuing their investigation after the charges were dropped."

Knight said Ounba-Payne is back driving for Metro Taxi, which he was unable to do while the charges were pending. He could not be reached for comment.

"He's doing great," Knight said. "But this was an absolute nightmare. You see it on TV occasionally, but he really dodged a bullet. If not for GPS (global positioning) technology in the cab that corroborated what he told police, it would have been easy to close the file and hand him over to the prosecutors. Who knows if it truly would have found her believable? This guy has a wife who is a court reporter," Knight said. "He has two teenage children. He's never been arrested. He's an immigrant in this county, legally working hard to achieve the American dream."

"This female decides to try and beat him out of cab fare and when he pro-

tests she decides to slap a rape conviction against him. This charge carried a possible sentence of 20 years." Knight said. "It would have been very easy to hand it off to the prosecutor and beyond the call of duty, something made her pursue it. She was more interested in the truth than in closing the file."

Knight also credited Murray for her dogged pursuit of the case. "She went above and beyond the call of duty," Knight said. "It would have been very easy to hand it off to the prosecutor and beyond the call of duty, something made her pursue it. She was more interested in the truth than in closing the file."

Michael Gannon can be reached at mgannon@nhregister.com or 789-5710.