Beat: Miscellaneous

U.S. mom who drove kids into ocean charged with attempted murder

-, 07.03.2014, 23:36 Time

USPA News - A mother from South Carolina was arrested in Florida on Friday on three counts of attempted first-degree murder after driving a minivan carrying her three children into the Atlantic Ocean, Volusia County officials said. The kids were all rescued.

Investigators said Ebony Wilkerson, 32, from Cross, South Carolina, was trying to kill her children - ages 3, 9, and 10 - when she drove her 2012 Honda Odyssey into ocean surf in Daytona Beach on Tuesday. She was arrested Friday morning on three counts of attempted first degree murder and three counts of aggravated child abuse after being released from Halifax Health Medical Center. "Ebony Wilkerson acted with premeditated design to kill her three children," investigators concluded in the charging affidavit. At around 5 p.m. local time on Tuesday, Wilkerson approached the beach on Silver Beach Avenue in Daytona Beach and was seen driving recklessly by a beach safety officer. The vehicle drove southbound in the surf, parallel to the shore, before turning east and driving into 3 to 4 feet (0.9 to 1.2 meter) of water. Wilkerson repeatedly told rescuers who approached the vehicle that everyone was okay while the children continued to scream for help. Bystanders responded to the incident and pulled the two eldest children to safety while a lifeguard dived into the vehicle to release the 3-year-old toddler who was strapped in a booster seat. The 10-year-old and 9-year-old were interviewed by the Volusia Sheriff`s Office to get a detailed account of what led to the incident. One of the children told investigators that their mother had locked the vehicle doors and put the windows up, saying she was doing it to keep them all safe, sheriff?s office spokesman Gary Davidson said. "She actually told them to close their eyes and go to sleep, she was taking them to a better place," Volusia County Sheriff Ben Johnson said at a press conference on Friday. According to the Sheriff, Wilkerson told investigators that she was trying to drive out of the surf, not into it, and has denied trying to harm her children. Witnesses of the incident counter that statement saying Wilkerson`s 9-year-old son struggled to gain control of the steering wheel and lead them away from the water. Investigators interviewed a family member who said Wilkerson was in an abusive relationship and that she went to Florida with her children to get away from her husband. The relative also said that Wilkerson had no history of mental illness. "Our goal is to get her into the system so that we can protect the children and take whatever action we need to help her too," Johnson said. Wilkerson was admitted to Halifax Health for a mental health evaluation following Tuesday`s incident, but she was released on Friday before being arrested. The children were turned over to the care of the Florida Department of Children and Families.

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-1982/us-mom-who-drove-kids-into-ocean-charged-with-attempted-murder.html

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483 Green Lanes
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