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Posted on Tue, Dec. 16, 2003

## Judge to decide if abducted boy will be returned to mother

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The Dallas Morning News

**DALLAS** - (KRT) - Dallas County family court judge could decide Wednesday whether an 8-month-old Grand Prairie boy abducted by his father last month will return to his mother's custody, authorities said.

Child welfare officials recovered the baby Sunday evening when police arrested his father, Charles Leon Wood, at the San Antonio airport as he arrived on a flight from Mexico City.

"The main thing is the child is safe and healthy," said Detective John Brimmer, a Grand Prairie police spokesman.

The baby, Braeden Thomas Wood, arrived at Dallas Love Field on Monday night with an attorney appointed by a family court judge and was taken into

Child Protective Services custody. Braeden had been missing since Nov. 8, the day police say Wood used a stun gun on the boy's mother and abducted him.

It was unclear Monday why Braeden would not immediately be returned to his mother, Tiffany Wood, who is Wood's estranged wife. Wood, who had temporary custody while the couple's divorce was being settled, could not be reached for comment Monday.

Wood has alleged that his former wife was not fit to raise Braeden, telling people involved in the case that's what prompted the abduction.

The court-ordered involvement of CPS and a court-appointed lawyer is "normal under the circumstances," said attorney John Schorsch Jr. of Dallas, who is representing Braeden's interests in the case.

Schorsch, who noted that Braeden was smiling, agreeable and in good health Monday, said he spoke to Wood several times Friday and Saturday - though he didn't know his whereabouts.

Wood, who made calls to authorities, his mother and the media in what Brimmer described as "a cat-and-mouse game" while he eluded police, had finally agreed to come back to Texas and turn himself in Monday.

But as Wood's flight on Mexicana Airlines approached Texas, agents with the federal Bureau of Customs and Border Protection discovered the arrest warrants against him in a routine criminal database search of the passengers.

San Antonio International Airport police arrested Wood after he left the plane with the baby and more than \$16,000 in cash, some of it wadded in a diaper bag, a bureau official said.

"If he had chosen to stay away, he could have," Schorsch said.

Two Grand Prairie police detectives traveled Monday to San Antonio to return Wood for an arraignment hearing Tuesday. They plan to charge him with two counts of violating a protective order, one count of interference with child custody and burglary of a habitation - a second-degree felony punishable by up to 20 years in jail, Detective Brimmer said.

Schorsch said that the Wednesday hearing in Dallas County family court probably would cover "preliminary" matters, and

that a final decision on what's best for the baby might not come until later.

Until the judge decides, Braeden will be placed in foster care, said Marleigh Meisner, a CPS spokeswoman.

"There is a custody issue between the two parents and the child," she said. "We're simply taking the child while the judge is deciding the custody issue."

Wood filed for divorce in June after 16 months of marriage. Braeden is the couple's only child together.

According to court testimony and police reports, there were physical confrontations before the divorce filing. Wood has said in court documents that Wood was threatening.

Two days after the abduction, during which police say Wood entered his wife's home through an unlocked back door, authorities issued an Amber Alert. Such alerts are typically not issued in custody cases. Police said the decision came after Wood told an attorney he would not be taken into custody alive.

Since then, police and Dana Ames of the nonprofit United Response Search and Rescue had tried to persuade Wood to return. Ames' group helps find missing and abducted people.

"I'm not saying that what he did was right," said Ames, who flew with Schorsch to San Antonio to get Braeden. "However, I have concerns that the child needs to be taken into CPS care and investigation needs to be done."

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