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photo

Police find missing girl's body

By [Peter Hirschfeld](#) Vermont Press Bureau

RANDOLPH CENTER — Police on Wednesday found the body of a 12-year-old Braintree girl near the home of a Randolph man suspected in her kidnapping.

Search crews uncovered the remains of Brooke Bennett at 4:45 p.m. Wednesday from a freshly dug grave off Crocker Road in Randolph Center.

Col. James Baker, director of the Vermont State Police, said the death "clearly" is suspicious.

"It is with a heavy heart and deep sadness that I announce that we have located what we believe to be the remains of Brooke Bennett," Baker said during a 6 p.m. news conference at Whitcomb High School in Bethel. "The painful discovery of Brooke's body today is tragic and heartbreaking."

Bennett's uncle, Michael Stephen Jacques, has been charged with aggravated sexual assault in a separate case as a result of the investigation into Bennett's disappearance. This morning, prosecutors are scheduled to file federal kidnapping charges against Jacques in the Bennett case.

"This investigation is making progress," Baker said. "With the discovery of Brooke, our investigation is now narrowed and focused."

Evidence uncovered during a search of Jacques' home on East Bethel Road led police to Crocker Road, according to Baker. Police have not disclosed the nature of that evidence, but forensic examiners had spent the past three days searching through Jacques' home, where they found computers, and his yard.

"Brooke was located as a result of information developed during the search of Michael Jacques' residence," Baker said.

On Tuesday, according to Baker, a team of specially trained FBI agents and Vermont State Police discovered recently disturbed ground off Crocker Road. They "froze" the site, Baker said, and returned to conduct a more thorough search Wednesday.

Police blocked access to both ends of the rural dirt road early Wednesday morning. Crocker Road runs parallel to East Bethel Road, where Jacques' home and property are located. Cruisers and K-9 units could be seen traversing the area throughout the day.

Bennett went missing June 25, and her grandmother reported her missing that night. Late June 26, police issued the state's first-ever Amber Alert.

"We remained optimistic that we would find her alive," Baker said, reading from a prepared statement. "(We) will be meeting with the family shortly to assure them that the investigative team that we have assembled is focused more than ever."

Bennett's body will be transported to the Chief Medical Examiner's Office in Burlington for conclusive identification and to determine the cause of death. Baker did not say Wednesday how the girl may have been killed, or where precisely her body was found.

"I recognize the information provided at this time is vague, however we felt it was important to inform you of the drastic change in the investigation," Baker said.

Jacques has been named as a "person of interest" in Bennett's disappearance.

At 6:54 p.m., police canceled the Amber Alert, saying that the missing girl had been found.
