

Attorney: Ohio Mosque a Threat to Runaway Teen

✖ The attorney for a runaway teen who claims her Muslim parents threatened to kill her for converting to Christianity claimed in court documents Monday that the Ohio mosque the girl's family attends has ties to Islamic terrorist organizations such as al-Qaida.

Orlando attorney John Stemberger said Rifqa Bary should be put in state custody because she is in "clear and present danger" from the Noor Islamic Cultural Center near Columbus. He said the mosque hosted extremist speakers and supported a Muslim scholar with ties to the militant group Hamas.

"The problem is not Islam; the problem is the Noor Center," Stemberger said Monday. "Because this is a unique mosque, that has unique beliefs and is extremely dangerous."

In his filing, Stemberger claims the mosque's leader, Hany Saqr, is a former leader at Omar Ibn El-Khattab Mosque in Columbus. Between 2003 and 2007, federal authorities charged three men who attended the Omar mosque with terrorist-related crimes.

In a 35-page filing, Stemberger alleged that Saqr was listed in the 1992 phone directory that ties him to the Muslim Brotherhood, which the attorney said is "responsible for birthing virtually every terrorist organization in the world, including al-Qaida."

Saqr denied Stemberger's claims. He told the Associated Press (AP) that he led prayers at the Omar mosque as a student years

ago but was never appointed full time.

He also said he did not know the Bary family personally but refuted claims that his mosque would support killing someone who converted from Islam.

"Changing the religion is something pretty natural and normal in this country," Saqr told the AP, adding that the mosque has invited atheist, Christian and Jewish speakers in the three years since it opened.

"At our center we know that people accept Islam, some people accept Christianity, some people accept Judaism," Saqr said. "Based on our religion we think that there's no compulsion to religion. Everybody has the right to choose whatever religion he wants to."

Bary said she accepted Christ in November 2005 at the Korean United Methodist Church in Columbus but kept her faith hidden from her parents out of fear.

In court documents, she said that in 2007 her father found a copy of *The Purpose-Driven Life* she had hidden in her bedroom. She said he had a "serious talk" with her "about the importance of retaining the Islamic blood line" in her family but she did not tell him of her conversion.

In June of this year she says her father confronted her about whether she had converted to Christianity and been baptized after he received numerous e-mails and phone calls from Noor Center leaders who told him he needed to "deal with this matter immediately."

"In a fit of anger that I had never seen before in my life, he picked up my laptop, waved it over my head as if to strike me with it and said: 'If you have this Jesus in your heart, you are dead to me! You are no longer my daughter,'" Bary said according to a court document. "I continued to remain silent and then he said to me even more angry than before: 'I will

kill you! Tell me the truth!'"

She said her mother confronted her on July 17 about another Christian book she found in Bary's bedroom. She said her mother had spoken with her father and was very upset "and almost grieving and told me I was going to have to be sent back to Sri Lanka to be dealt with."

Bary ran away to Florida two days later and lived with charismatic pastors Blake and Beverly Lorenz for nearly three weeks before being placed in an Orlando foster home. She met the couple through a prayer group on Facebook.

The couple denies claims that they lured Bary to Florida and say she contacted them after leaving Ohio. Blake Lorenz said he reported Bary to police after he learned she was listed as a missing person.

Mohamad and Aysha Bary say they never threatened to harm their daughter. Their attorneys allege the teen may have been brainwashed by the Florida pastors.

Although the case has been widely publicized, Stemberger said he still believes Bary could be harmed if she returned to her parents. "There is no question in my mind that if she is sent back to Ohio, it is only a matter of time before she slips away in the night," he said.

Stemberger wants Bary to maintain her "stable placement" in an Orlando foster home, where a Florida Circuit judge ordered her to remain while the Florida Department of Law Enforcement investigates her claims and the alleged threat posed by her family's ties to the Noor Center.

A hearing is scheduled for Thursday in Orlando.