

Judge Plans to Return Teen Convert to Ohio

✖ Teen convert Rifqa Bary may be returned to Ohio before the end of this month.

Florida Judge Daniel P. Dawson said today that he will order the teen to be transitioned back to her home state after her parents provide requested immigration documentation and it is determined whether the girl will be able to continue her education through a Florida virtual school program.

Bary, 17, could be returned to Ohio before Oct. 23, if all the necessary documentation is submitted to the court. Dawson said Florida would maintain emergency jurisdiction until then.

"The sooner these parties get into one courtroom before one judge, the better," Dawson said.

The judge said he had "grave concerns" that the court had not yet received immigration documents he ordered several times. "I don't think it's that hard," Dawson said.

Ohio Judge Elizabeth Gill, who participated in the hearing by phone, also said she wants the teen's immigration documents submitted to the court before she is transferred. When moved, the teen would be placed in an Ohio foster home.

Florida attorney Shayan Elahi, who is representing Bary's father, said the documents could be provided this week.

The Bary family immigrated from Sri Lanka and now live near Columbus, Ohio.

Rifqa Bary fled to Orlando, Fla., in July claiming her Muslim parents threatened to kill her for converting to Christianity, an allegation her parents deny. The teen lived with a charismatic pastor-couple for nearly three weeks before being

placed in an Orlando foster home. The pastors are now being investigated by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement for their role in getting the teen to Orlando.

Bary's parents have filed two actions in Ohio, which the teen's attorneys had argued that her parent's filings were just ploys to get the case moved to Ohio. But representatives from the Franklin County Prosecutor's Office said the state would move forward with a dependency hearing even if the Barys attempted to drop their case.

A hearing to determine whether Bary will be placed in Ohio state custody is likely to be held this week. If approved, the order would amend a previous agreement the girl's parents made with Franklin County Children's Services to keep the teen in Ohio foster care for 30 days while the family underwent counseling.

Tennessee-based minister Jamal Jivanjee, a convert from Islam who befriended Bary after her conversion to Christianity, said there is good news in the judge's decision.

"She stays in Florida," he said after the hearing. "It means she lives to fight another day."

He said he is glad the judge is taking a close look at her family's immigration status. He said Bary ran away to Florida because she feared her parents would send her to Sri Lanka to be punished for converting.

"As long as she's here, she's protected," he said.

In Ohio, however, he believes Bary would still be in danger from the strict Muslim community her family associated with.