

No Forced Mediation for Rifqa Bary, Florida Pastor Under Fire for Helping Runaway Teen



An Ohio judge ruled Tuesday that Christian convert Rifqa Bary does not have to meet with her Muslim parents as part of a possible reconciliation plan.

Magistrate Mary Goodrich of Franklin County Juvenile Court in Ohio denied Mohamed and Aysha Bary's request to force their 17-year-old daughter to participate in mediation, the *Columbus Post-Dispatch* reported.

Image: AP Photo/ George Skene

Bary has refused to have contact with her parents or siblings. She said she has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because of her ordeal and is not ready for mediation with her family. She is working with a counselor to determine if she has PTSD.

The teen will also be allowed to receive Christmas cards, letters and other messages from her supporters despite an attempt by her parents' attorney to block such "third-party correspondence." Mohamed and Aysha Bary's attorney, Omar Tarazi, had filed a motion asking that all third-party communication be directed to Franklin County Children Services. He withdrew the motion Tuesday without explanation.

Bary ran away from her home outside Columbus, Ohio, to Orlando, Fla., in July, saying her Muslim father threatened to kill her for converting to Christianity. Her father denies that allegation, and a Florida law enforcement investigation found no evidence to support her claims.

The teen was returned to Ohio in October, where she has been living in foster care. She seeks to remain in foster care until she turns 18. A hearing in her dependency case is scheduled for Jan. 19.

Meanwhile, Orlando pastor Blake Lorenz is under increasing scrutiny over his role in getting Bary to Florida. Lorenz and his wife, Beverly, met the girl through a prayer group on Facebook and sheltered her for nearly three weeks before she was placed in foster care.

In an affidavit filed in Ohio this week, a former administrator at the Lorenzes' church, Global Revolution Church, said several lawyers told Blake Lorenz that transporting the teen across state lines was unlawful.

In his sworn statement, Brian Smith said Lorenz and another church member bought Bary a bus ticket under a false name. Smith said Lorenz asked him for church money to pay some of the teen's expenses, including the cost of a bed and a disposable cell phone, the *Orlando Sentinel* reported.

Smith claims Lorenz refused to call Florida's Department of Children and Families when police and others advised him to report that the teen was living with him and his wife.

Lorenz told the *Sentinel* he was not worried about Smith's claims and that the truth would prevail. His attorney, Mathew Staver of Liberty Counsel, called Smith a disgruntled ex-employee.

"There's a lot of allegations in that affidavit that I know personally are not factual," Staver told the *Sentinel*. "I've known the Lorenzes for 20 years. The last thing they would do is intentionally violate the law."

Smith denied that he was disgruntled and said his statement is truthful based on the information he was told.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement told the Orlando newspaper it has completed its investigation into the pastors' role into Bary's flight to Florida. A decision on whether or not the Lorenzes will face charges has not been made.