

'Messiah' Fine as First Name for Baby Boy, Tenn. Judge Rules

A Tennessee judge on Wednesday restored a baby boy's given first name of Messiah, ruling unconstitutional a lower ranking judge's order changing it to Martin on the basis that *Messiah* is a title earned only by Jesus Christ.

The parents of Messiah DeShawn Martin had gone before Tennessee Child Support Magistrate Lu Ann Ballew in August because they could not agree on his last name. Ballew instead ordered the then-7-month-old baby's name changed to Martin DeShawn McCullough.

After her ruling, Ballew told WBIR television news, "The word *messiah* is a title, and it's a title that has only been earned by one person, and that one person is Jesus Christ."

The boy's parents, Jaleesa Martin and Jawaan McCullough, never stopped calling him Messiah and immediately appealed the ruling, says attorney Kristi Davis, who represents Messiah's mother.

Chancellor Telford E. Forgety Jr. reversed Ballew's decision, the Cocke County Chancery Court Clerk's Office said.

Davis says Forgety found that Ballew's ruling violated the guaranteed separation of church and state, since "the rationale for her decision was based on her Christian beliefs."

"They are just happy they can use the name that they gave the child and not the one that was picked by the judge," Davis says of the boy's parents. "I felt all along that if the chancellor followed the law, this was the decision he would

reach.”

The mother has dropped any dispute over Messiah’s last name.

Messiah was the 387th most popular name for boys born in the United States in 2012, based on applications for Social Security cards filed with the U.S. Social Security Administration.

In all, there were 762 applications for boys named Messiah in 2012, more than double the 368 applications made in 2011, the Social Security Administration said.

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