

Orlando Sentinel: Fathima Rifqa Bary: Ohio governor says send Rifqa Bary back; Gov. Ted Strickland's office says Ohio officials can protect Fathima Rifqa Bary, who ran away from her Muslim parents to Christian evangelists in Orlando

Staff Report

September 11, 2009

The office of Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland has issued a statement, saying the teenage girl who ran away from her Muslim home in Columbus, Ohio, to evangelical Christians in Orlando, should be returned.

"Child welfare agencies and authorities in Ohio and Franklin County are fully capable of providing for the security and well-being of Ohio's children," said the statement. "The governor believes this is a family matter and therefore would most appropriately be handled here in Ohio with the assistance of the child welfare and foster care system."

Fathima Rifqa Bary, 17, is currently living with a foster family in the Orlando area. She fled Columbus aboard a Greyhound bus in July, saying her father had threatened to kill her because she had abandoned his faith -- Islam -- and become a Christian.

Her father, Mohamed Bary, a jeweler and Amway distributor, says that never happened. A Florida Department of Law Enforcement investigation supports his claim. So does Franklin County Children's Services, the child welfare agency serving Columbus.

Amanda Wurst, a spokeswoman for Strickland, who is an ordained Methodist minister, first issued the statement yesterday. It puts Strickland at odds with Florida's Gov. Charlie Crist.

Three weeks ago, Crist issued a statement, saying he was grateful for a decision by Orange Circuit Judge Daniel Dawson to keep Rifqa in Florida.

Earlier that day, Crist had sent two powerful figures - Rob Wheeler, his top lawyer; and George Sheldon, secretary for the Florida Department of Children and Families ? to a hearing at which the judge ruled that Rifqa should stay in Florida, at least temporarily.

"We'll continue to fight to protect Rifqa's safety and wellbeing as we move forward," said Crist in his statement.

Rifqa's story has set off a firestorm of reaction, especially among evangelical Christians. Crist's office reported today that it had received more than 10,000 pieces of e-mail about it.

Wurst said the Ohio governor's office has received more than 400 calls, e-mails and letters about the issue.

Many people have said they're sure Rifqa will be killed if she's returned to Ohio, if not by her father then by Columbus-area Muslims who believe she's dishonored them.

Columbus-area law enforcement officials say there's no evidence to support that claim, and Strickland's office said the same thing.

"We have no reason to believe that she would be unsafe in Ohio," according to his statement.

Bucyrus Telegraph Forum: JFS fall fest focuses on families, services

*By Terricha Bradley
September 14, 2009*

GALION -- Crawford County Job and Family Services wants to spread awareness about preventing child abuse and to help families foster and adopt children.

On Saturday, the agency had its first fall festival to unite the community and foster families.

Director Tom O'Leary sees the desire and demand from couples to foster children and move toward adoption.

"In this county, there's a nice mix of new and existing fostering families. A lot of times, families get a fostering license, then adopt," he said.

Outside the Children Services building at 865 Harding Way West, several hundred families played games and enjoyed food, a petting zoo and live bands.

Tori Barnett, 9, of Willard, enjoyed the animals from the Delphos-based Jungle Island Zoo.

"It's fun because they're so sweet and little," Tori said after feeding a baby kangaroo. "But it's hard to keep them from biting your shirt. I love all animals."

Agency employees sold baked goods and held a silent auction. Proceeds from the sales will help send foster children to Washington, D.C., next year. Hands on Therapies gave out free massages and vendors sold Avon and Mary Kay products.

Sharon Powell and her sister Diane sold jewelry and played with kids during the afternoon. Sharon, a therapeutic foster parent, said she believes the event helps prospective parents meet children.

"Word of mouth is the best way to recruit foster parents," said the Galion woman. "If they come here (to the festival), it takes away any fears they might have."

Randy and Laurie Moore of Galion brought the four children they adopted last Christmas.

"There's a lot of caring going on, watching the kids play. They love it," Randy said.

Laurie agreed.

"It's a nice opportunity to meet kids. It helps them know they're not alone," she said.

Youngstown Vindicator: Innocent pleas made to added charges in child abuse case

Staff Report

September 14, 2009

WARREN — Damion C. Wise, 30, of Everett East Road, Brookfield Township, pleaded innocent Monday in Trumbull County Common Pleas Court to the eight new charges handed up against him by a county grand jury on Friday.

Among the eight is one count of rape, which carries a possible life sentence if convicted. Wise's indictment alleges he raped his 8-year-old stepson sometime during the three to four months he, his wife, infant son and stepson lived in Brookfield.

The other charges added together carry a penalty of 44 more years in prison if convicted. They include felonious assault — one on Aug. 21 and one at some other point this summer — and seven counts of endangering children. One of

those charges allegedly occurred Aug. 20, two of them Aug. 21 and the rest during an unspecified date during the summer.

Wise was arrested and his stepson rescued and taken to the hospital Aug. 22 after a caller told police about the boy's injuries. The boy and his 5-month-old brother are in the care of the Trumbull County Children's Services Board.

The boy told police Aug. 22 that Wise had beaten him with a small baseball bat and his fist, stuck his fingers down the boy's throat and threatened to maim or kill him. The boy had black eyes, facial swelling and bruises on his hand, arm, chest, back and stomach, police said.

Judge Peter Kontos doubled Wise's bond Monday from \$250,000 to \$500,000.

Columbus Dispatch: School leaders' licenses revoked; State board finally resolves Columbus cases from 2005

*By Jennifer Smith Richards
September 16, 2009*

Years after they failed to properly report students' allegations of sexual abuse, two former Columbus principals have been barred from leading schools in Ohio.

The State Board of Education voted 10-5 yesterday to revoke Dora E. Kunz's principal's license and ban her from reapplying for five years, and 15-0 to permanently revoke a license held by former Mifflin High School Principal Regina Crenshaw.

Crenshaw said she wouldn't work as an educator after the district fired her for failing to call police after a sexual assault at her school.

But Kunz, who was principal at Winterset Elementary in Columbus when a teacher was accused of inappropriately touching a student, now is director of a teacher-preparation program at Southwest Florida College and also is licensed to be a principal in that state's elementary, middle and high schools.

Kunz had worked in Columbus City Schools for about 36 years when allegations were made against teacher Gary Stroup in 2002. She said she followed what she believed was district policy, ignorant of the state law requiring her to call police or a children's services agency when abuse is alleged. She did tell other administrators, who she said told her it wasn't necessary to call authorities.

"Of course, I wish I had called. I would never, never do something to hurt a child," Kunz said yesterday from her Florida home. "Had I known (the law), had I not been told not to (call), I would have reported him and had a full investigation and let the wrath of whatever come down on him."

Stroup was charged in 2005 based on allegations at Winterset and another Columbus school. In 2007, he was convicted of two counts of gross sexual imposition, a felony, after at least nine students said he touched, massaged and tickled them, some in genital areas.

He's serving a four-year sentence at the Chillicothe Correctional Institution.

The Stroup case came to light shortly after the high-profile sexual assault at Mifflin.

"Honestly, I believe I was an easy target," Kunz said. After Mifflin, there was heightened public awareness of the reporting requirements for educators and intense scrutiny of the Columbus school district's procedures.

"They could point to me and say, 'We've done something. Look, we are diligent.'"

Southwest Florida College officials wouldn't comment about Kunz. She said she is helping the college open a new branch and hiring instructors for both educational and other fields of study.

Kunz still holds a teaching license in Ohio. The state wants to take action against that, too, and will have a hearing in October.

The former Mifflin principal, Crenshaw, could not be reached at her home or through her attorney.

She failed to call police or Franklin County Children Services when a developmentally disabled 16-year-old girl said she was forced to perform oral sex on another student in March 2005.

Both her teaching and principal's licenses have expired since she was fired in 2007. The permanent revocation of her license, a formality to ensure she can't reapply, is based on "Crenshaw's apparent disregard for the seriousness of the incident involving the alleged sexual abuse of a student," according to the written recommendation of state hearing officer Mary K. Crawford.

An Ohio Department of Education office investigates misconduct cases, dispenses written discipline and recommends to the state board when it thinks

educators' licenses should be revoked or suspended. The board votes on discipline each month.

The Kunz and Crenshaw cases took years because both matters were complicated. Kunz had moved to Florida, making it difficult to schedule hearings, Lori M. Kelly, an associate director in the investigation office, said in an e-mail.

The state struck a deal with Kunz in which she agreed not to use her license to get a job until the disciplinary process was complete. In exchange, she received more time to work out hearing dates. Kunz already had obtained her Florida principal's license by showing her valid Ohio one.

Crenshaw's case was sticky because she was also involved in legal proceedings. She fended off a criminal charge that she failed to report suspected child abuse but lost an appeal to get her job back.

The state waited for those matters to resolve, held a hearing in 2008, and then had trouble serving Crenshaw with the recommendation that her license be revoked, Kelly said.

Cincinnati Enquirer: Cops: Handicapped child locked in room

*By Jennifer Baker
September 16, 2009*

GREENHILLS – The mother of an 11-year-old mentally handicapped child was arrested and charged Tuesday night with leaving her locked and unattended in her bedroom.

Bonnie Allen, 46, was booked into the Hamilton County jail about 9:30 p.m. on two counts of child endangering.

She neglected her daughter by leaving her alone in the locked bedroom with no food, water, or access to bathrooms, according to Greenhills police.

At the time, no one else was home in the Damon Road residence, court records state.

It isn't clear yet today if the girl is in the care of a relative or a foster home.

Chillicothe Gazette: Charges possible after alleged abuse caught on camera

Staff Report

September 17, 2009

Ross County Prosecutor Michael Ater is awaiting additional information to determine whether a caregiver's alleged abuse which was supposedly caught on hidden camera will result in charges being filed.

According to an initial Ross County Sheriff's Office report, deputies responded to an apartment on Cattail Road on a call of suspected abuse by the caregiver of a 16-year-old girl with developmental disabilities.

Officers spoke with the parents of the girl, who told them they suspected their daughter, who suffers from cerebral palsy and mental retardation and shows autistic symptoms, was being abused by her caretaker, a woman employed by Easter Seals.

They told deputies they bought a camera system and installed it in the living room area prior to leaving the apartment Sept. 12 to see if their suspicions were justified.

Upon returning to the home, they discovered their daughter was upset, and said she usually is agitated when the caretaker arrives and leaves the home.

"She flipped out," Pam Allison, mother of the teen, told Gazette partner 10TV News for a story that appeared Tuesday. "(My daughter) pulled my hair, scratched me, left these marks on me."

Reviewing the tape, they observed the caretaker grabbing their daughter by the arms numerous times and, on one occasion, sitting on the teen.

The officer taking the report said he saw the tape and witnessed the caretaker taking a piece of reading material away from the girl and sitting on her. In the videotape, the girl and caregiver appear to wrestle over the magazine.

The tape also shows what the reporting officer said was "(the caregiver) combing (the girl's) hair in an aggressive manner and pushing her head forward."

The parents contacted Easter Seals, and the officer told the agency what he had witnessed. The caregiver's supervisor indicated she would complete a report for the agency and Ross County MRDD. The officer indicated he would forward the

report to Ross County Children's Services so it also could be included in the investigation.

The parents indicated the caretaker had eaten their food, taken naps when she was supposed be taking care of their daughter and had made numerous long distance phone calls on their residential telephone, to the point where they had to turn off service to their home phone

Rob Duvall, marketing director for Easter Seals, said the caretaker was fired Tuesday and the office is fully cooperating with law enforcement and Children's Services in the investigation.

Duvall said it is the agency's policy to ensure the safety and security of the families they provide services for.

Ater, before making a decision on criminal charges, is awaiting a copy of the final incident report and the opportunity to view the videotape. The caregiver's name is not being released because charges have not been filed yet.

Columbus Dispatch: Charges in baby's abandonment filed

*By Jim Woods and Rita Price
September 17, 2009*

A woman who authorities say left a baby on her neighbor's doorstep was charged yesterday with abandonment.

Meanwhile, the baby, who police call Samuel Doe, was released from Nationwide Children's Hospital. Franklin County Children Services has placed the child in foster care, said agency spokeswoman Doris Calloway Moore.

"He is a big boy," Moore said. "He seems healthy."

The newborn was left at 10 p.m. Saturday at 809 Kelton Ave.

A woman who identified herself as the child's mother called Columbus police on Sunday, expressing regret.

Police yesterday sent a summons to Heather Herdman, 22, of 807 Kelton Ave., charging her with abandonment or nonsupport of a dependent, which is a first-degree misdemeanor.

Columbus Police Sgt. John Hurst said that Herdman has two other small children and "felt overwhelmed."

Herdman gave birth to the 9-pound baby boy in her apartment, Hurst said. A few hours later, she put the child in a Winnie-the-Pooh outfit, wrapped him in a blanket, rang the doorbell and walked away, he said.

A DNA test will be done to confirm that Herdman is the boy's mother, Hurst said.

If Herdman had left the baby under the rules of the state's "Safe Haven" law, she would not have been charged. With Safe Haven, birth parents can anonymously surrender an infant to police, firefighters, emergency medical workers or hospitals without fear of prosecution.

Cleveland Plain Dealer: Three former Parmadale workers plead not guilty in teen Faith Finley's death

By Leila Atassi

September 17, 2009

CLEVELAND, Ohio — Three former child-care workers with Parmadale Family Services were arraigned this morning on charges of involuntary manslaughter and endangering children in connection with the death of 17-year-old Parmadale resident Faith Finley.

Lazarita Menendez, 28, of Bedford Heights, Ebony Ray, 33, of Broadview Heights, and Cynthia King, 32, of Warrensville Heights, pleaded not guilty to the charges in Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court. Menendez also pleaded not guilty to additional charges of felonious assault and inciting to violence accusing her instigating the events that led to Faith's death.

Prosecutors said the workers disregarded their training about the use and dangers of restraints when they held Faith in a face-down or prone position - a type of restraint widely considered dangerous - for up to two hours following an emotional outburst Dec. 13.

Faith had been living at the residential treatment facility for several months being treated for depression.

Prosecutors said that after Faith didn't follow an order, Menendez confiscated the teen's CD player, an object she had chosen as a "coping device" to use when she was upset or angry.

Workers were told not to take the coping devices as punishment, prosecutors said. Faith began screaming and became destructive and combative. Then she was restrained.

Coroner Frank Miller ruled Faith's death a homicide in January and determined the restraint and the pressure on her abdomen caused her to suffocate and choke on her vomit.

Parmadale staff told a 9-1-1 dispatcher that Faith had been breathing shallowly for about 20 minutes before becoming unresponsive. But when an ambulance arrived within minutes of the call, emergency workers noted Faith was already cool to the touch.

Parmadale fired the three women in February after a state review found that they did not follow the facility's policies.

Dayton Daily News: 10-month-old put into scalding water, police say; mother faces charges

*By Lucas Sullivan
September 18, 2009*

DAYTON — A 20-year-old pregnant mother has been charged with one count of third-degree felony child endangering after police said she placed her 10-month-old daughter in 140-degree bath water.

Donnishia Peterson was questioned by officers about 2:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 16, after the child was placed in the bath at 3709 E. Cornell Woods Drive, police said.

The child suffered second-degree burns on her legs and feet — skin peeling off her toes, police said. Officers responding to Dayton Children's Medical Center said the child was in such bad shape that they, too, became emotional.

Peterson told officers that a fan she was using to dry carpet fell on her daughter and caused the burns, police said. Investigators said based on statements by medical experts, Peterson's story is not credible.

"She wouldn't come off that story, though," Dayton Sgt. Judy Abshire said.

Doctors said the infant obtained the burns by "submersion," said Ann Stevens, Montgomery County Department of Jobs and Family Services spokeswoman.

Police were not sure if Peterson, who is nearly nine months pregnant, checked the water before placing the infant in it, Abshire said. It was also unclear why the water was so hot.

The infant is expected to recover, Abshire said.

Children services is investigating and has no prior cases involving Peterson or her daughter, Stevens said. The infant will be placed with a relative or in foster care once she's released, Stevens said.