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Muslim teen fears for life after changing religion

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By John Couwels CNN

(CNN) -- A Muslim teenager from Ohio says her father threatened to kill her because she converted to Christianity.



Rifqa Bary claims her father wants her dead after she converted to Christianity.

Rifqa Bary, 17, ran away from her family in Columbus, Ohio, in July and took refuge in the central Florida home of the Rev. Blake Lorenz with the Global Revolution Church in Orlando.

The teen heard of the pastor and his church through a prayer group on Facebook. The girl's parents reported her missing to Columbus police, who found her two weeks later in Florida through cell phone records.

The teenager, in a sworn affidavit, claims her father, Mohamed Bary, 47, was pressured by the mosque the family attends in Ohio to "deal with the situation." In the court filing, Rifqa Bary stated her father said, "If you have this Jesus in your heart, you are dead to me!" The teenager claims her father added, "I will kill you!"

Mohamed Bary told CNN a lot of false information has been given and "we wouldn't do her harm." He knew his daughter was involved with Christian organizations.

"I have no problem with her practicing any faith," he said, but Bary admitted he would have preferred his daughter to practice the Muslim faith first.

Although Mohamed Bary said he did not expect his daughter to run away, Rifqa Bary was placed in foster care by an Orlando judge in August while the Florida Department of Children and Family investigated the threat allegations against the parents.

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allegations.

In a court filing Monday, John Stemberger, Rifqa Bary's attorney and president of the Christian advocacy organization Florida Family Policy Council, accused the parents' Ohio mosque of having ties to terrorism and radical Islam. The Noor Islamic Cultural Center has denied the

Stemberger told CNN he agreed with his client that she would be killed by radical Muslims if she is returned to Ohio.

"She is a person who is ripe for apostate killing or mercy killing. I'm not going to let my client slip away in the night by going back," said Stemberger.

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Teen convert says she ran away from Muslim father after he allegedly threatened her
• Rifqa Bary's attorney says his client would be killed if she is returned to Ohio
• Mohammed Bary calls allegations false, says Rifqa can practice any faith she wants
• Hearing on case is scheduled for Thursday in Florida

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Roger Weeden, the mother's attorney in Florida, said the filing had no credible evidence but instead was meant "just to inflame the community and the court." Weeden said he believes the teen's attorney is trying to create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

The teen's attorney said his client has endured a history of abuse from her family. Stemberger said the young girl was forced to wear the Muslim headscarf called a hijab and was punched in the face by her father for being ashamed while wearing it.

Stemberger is asking the court to keep Rifqa Bary in the custody of the state of Florida until she turns 18 in a year.

Mohamed Bary, who is not a United States citizen, said he can't believe all the false allegations and the bad image caused by the situation.

"We are not bad people," Bary said. "We are not like that, we are normal."

The mother's attorney said the teenager was a normal girl, a cheerleader in Ohio, and what Muslim extremist would allow his daughter be a cheerleader?

At a court hearing scheduled for Thursday in Orlando, the parents will have an opportunity to respond to the allegations against them. Their attorney said the parents will deny all allegations.

After the court hearing, the judge may force all the parties involved into mediation, followed by an adjudication hearing. [E-mail to a friend](#) | [Mixx it](#) | [Share](#)

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