

Ohio mother jailed for enrolling daughters in suburban school district

Phyllis Scherrer
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An Ohio mother of two was jailed for nine days, placed on two years' probation and required to complete 80 hours of community service for sending her two daughters to suburban schools. Her January 15 conviction provoked an outpouring of outrage.

Kelly Williams-Bolar was convicted of two felonies for tampering with records to enroll her daughters in the Copley-Fairlawn school district, just west of Akron, where her father lives. Williams-Bolar was originally sentenced to two concurrent five-year terms. But the judge reduced the sentence to time served after she made an impassioned appeal to not be taken from her daughters.

A single mother from Akron, Williams-Bolar is attending college and is three courses shy of acquiring her teaching degree while working as a teaching assistant at Buchtel High School in Akron Public Schools. This felony conviction means she will not be allowed to get her teaching certificate in Ohio.

She has always insisted that her decision to enroll her daughters in the more affluent Copley-Fairlawn schools was a matter of their personal safety and her desire to see that the children received a decent education.

The case began in the 2006-2007 school year, when Williams-Bolar's daughters were in middle school. After the family's home was burglarized, the Akron mother feared for her daughters' safety and decided to transfer them to the Copley-Fairlawn school district where her father lives. For the children to be accepted, she had to state that she and the children were living with their grandfather.

The school district spent more than \$6,000 to hire private detectives, who followed the children home to show that they were staying with their mother in Akron, and not with their grandfather.

In the past several years, the Copley-Fairlawn district

has expelled 48 students who were found not be living in the area. This is the first case where they insisted on prosecuting the mother. There is no case in recent Ohio history in which parents have been prosecuted for sending their children to another school.

Akron was once the leading rubber manufacturing hub of the world, with companies like Firestone and Goodyear employing tens of thousands. Akron currently has a population of 207,216. According to census records, 12,282 households live on less than \$10,000 a year. An additional 25,000 households live on less than \$25,000 a year.

Faced with deteriorating public school systems like that in Akron, tens of thousands of parents in cities across the country send their kids to better school districts using the address of their parents, grandparents or other relatives.

While better off than the Akron school district, the Copley-Fairlawn district is facing severe financial shortfalls, and cuts in state and federal support are placing pressure on the district to trim costs.

The jailing of a working class mother for sending her two children to a more affluent neighboring school district with the hope of getting them a better education is meant to send a chilling message to every parent, grandparent or guardian desperate to provide a better future for their children and lift them out of poverty.

People throughout the country have been outraged by Kelly Williams-Bolar's conviction and jailing and the conditions that she and other parents face. Thousands have signed electronic petitions calling for her to be pardoned.

Ruby Lockett, whose daughter recently graduated from high school in Akron, spoke to the WSWs. "I don't see any parent being penalized for trying to get a better education for their child.," she said. "You also

have to realize that you have kids that are being jumped every day by gangs. Kids are being intimidated in classrooms; they are being chased home. Nobody knows what the situation was at that school.

“There had to be a reason that she would go to that length to send them to a different school. I’ve been through it with my daughter where she was jumped. They even came to the house. So, would you rather ‘break the law’ and send your child to a better school, or send them to school and not know whether they are going to come home safely or not? I think that’s what that parent was thinking about.

“The problem is the poverty that leads to gangs. In inner city schools, the conditions are such that the teachers are just managing the students. They’re not really able to teach them. This leads to high dropout rates.

“The main question, though, is why don’t all kids have good schools. They are trying to merge Perkins Middle School with the high school. There is already a high teen pregnancy rate. You better believe that if you start putting 12-13-year-old girls in with high school 17-18-year-old boys, the teen pregnancy rate will go up. It’s too much, the social environment will not let the younger kids grow at their rate.”

Robert Shawn Hall and Anthony Hamilton, both in their early 20s, spoke about life in Akron, Ohio, and the decision to jail Ms. Williams-Bolar.

Anthony said, “In my opinion, it is wrong for them to jail a mother for trying to do right by her kids. Some of the schools in Akron are not that good, and for them to send her to jail, that is just wrong.

“There are not very many jobs at all in Akron. I was working through a temporary service for 10 months, and then they just fired me. I was working in manufacturing, the company made all kinds of things. We were only making \$10 an hour, but when it came time to make us permanent employees, they just fired us all instead.

“I can see why this mother wanted to get her kids into a better school, so that they could have a future. Isn’t that what they tell everyone, go to school? But she does that, and they want to send her to jail. That is not right at all.”

“I feel she had the right to protect her children,” Robert said. “Her father was living in that school district and paying taxes. Who is to say that her

daughters weren’t living with him? She lives in the projects, and things are real bad there. Most people don’t have jobs, and there is a lot of crime and people selling drugs.

“All these politicians are cutting back, and they are just looking for any way to save a few dollars and they don’t care what happens to the children.”



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