

## Christian Convert Stays in Florida for Now

ORLANDO, Fla. (Sept. 3) — Nothing in a police report supports the belief of an Ohio teenager that she would be in jeopardy if she returned home, despite her claims that she fears for her life for converting from Islam to Christianity, her mother's attorney said in court Thursday.

Meanwhile, Circuit Judge Dan Dawson ruled that Rifqa Bary will remain in her Florida foster home until all parties have had time to read the report and discuss a mediated settlement.

The police report, which was ordered sealed for 10 days by Dawson, contains the results of a two-week investigation by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement into Bary's family and her home life. The 17-year-old ran away from her parents' home in suburban Columbus, Ohio, in July, saying she feared being killed for changing religions. The family immigrated from Sri Lanka in 2000.

The FDLE report is "favorable" to Bary's parents and "indicates there is no evidence out there whatsoever to corroborate these accusations," said Roger Weeden, an attorney for Rifqa Bary's mother, Aysha.

Weeden was cut off from saying any more about the report because it has been sealed. The judge also issued a gag order prohibiting attorneys from talking to the media about the case.

The case is headed for a trial in which the judge will hear testimony and decide whether Rifqa Bary should be returned to Ohio. The judge set a pretrial hearing for the end of the month and asked that all sides try to talk within the next month.

After Rifqa Bary ran away, police used phone and computer records to track her to the Rev. Blake Lorenz, pastor of Orlando, Fla.-based Global Revolution Church. Authorities said Bary met him through an online Facebook prayer group.

Bary wants to stay in her Florida foster home. Her parents in Ohio say they have never threatened her and they want her home.

Thursday's hearing was contentious as attorneys for the parents accused Rifqa

Bary's attorney, John Stemberger, of using the case to smear Islam. Stemberger, who is president of a local Christian advocacy group, on Monday filed documents alleging her family's mosque in Ohio has terrorist ties — a charge disputed by the Islamic center's leader.

"My client has been dragged through the mud in this case," Weeden said. "It's an attack on my client in particular and on their religion in general."