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While various states and the federal government play policy ping-pong on the issue of school desegregation/diversity, the plight of one mother has starkly symbolized the obstacles that often confront less-than-privileged parents who seek quality education for their children.

When, a single Black mother living in public housing in Akron, Ohio, was sentenced to 10 days in jail for sending her daughters to the Copley-Fairlawn school district outside of her educational jurisdiction, the issue of what parents — especially Black, low-income parents — will do to get their children a better education burst into the national consciousness.

“This is not the first time that a family has lied to get their children a better, safer education,” writes Lisa Belkin on The New York Times Parenting Blogs. “Throughout the country, financially strapped school districts have been increasing surveillance in the weakened economy… reluctant to spend money teaching students who are not legally entitled to be there.”

Williams-Bolar's father lives in the Copley-Fairlawn district and in November, 2009, she was arrested and charged with two felony counts of tampering with official records for putting her father's address on her daughters' school records.

"She was also charged with grand theft — the school wanted $30,000 in tuition for the two girls — but the jury could not reach a unanimous decision," reported Newser.com.

"Williams-Bolar is not even the first parent accused of sneaking into this particular district during the particular years in question," Belkin wrote on the Times blog. "As… noted in The Beacon Journal during the trial, '...school-district officials testified that some 30 to 40 similar residency issues had arisen with other families during the two years at issue in Williams-Bolar's case. No one else faced criminal prosecution or civil court action, the school officials said.'"

The Superintendent admitted that similar cases are normally resolved without legal intervention. Ironically, the beleaguered mother was a semester away from completing an education degree at the University of Akron. She worked as a special needs teaching assistant at a local high school but, as a convicted felon, could no longer qualify for that position.

For days, the blogosphere was aflame with updates and opinions from all sides. Many debated whether race was an issue. Several wondered why the charges were so harsh but in spite of several pre-trial hearings, "the state would not move, would not budge, and offer Ms. Williams-Bolar to plead to a misdemeanor," the Akron Beacon Journal stated.

The activist blogs Colorofchange.org and Change.org gathered more than 100,000 signatures on petitions in support of Williams-Bolar.

On January 27th, the notorious mother was released a day early, facing two years of probation and 80 hours of community service. In early February, Williams-Bolar met with the Reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton about her case. A rally is being planned in Ohio and Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr. "is working to secure a Constitutional Amendment to guarantee all children access to an equal and high-quality education," according to Newser.com.

On Feb. 1st, Ohio Governor John Kasich, a Republican, issued a statement saying he was “really struck” by the issue. “Karen and I work hard to make a better future for our girls so when I first heard about Ms. Kelley Williams-Bolar’s case last week, it really struck me as it has many other people… Our laws exist for a reason and they must be enforced but the idea that a woman would become a convicted felon for wanting a better future for her children is something that has rightly raised a lot of concern with people, including me.”

From the school district’s perspective, it boils down to dollars and cents. The school district spent about $6,000 to hire a private investigator to follow Williams-Bolar and her children and bring them to trial, according to NewsNet5 in Akron.

“Copley-Fairlawn Superintendent Brian Poe said the district has lost hundreds of thousands of dollars because of children illegally enrolled in its schools. ‘If you’re paying taxes on a home here… those dollars need to stay home with our students,’” Poe reportedly told NewsNet5.

Which raises the question: what about those 30 to 40 other cases?

At the heart of the controversy is a parent’s drive to seek the best for their children and the question of what parents will risk for better opportunities

“I did this for them, so there it is,” Williams-Bolar told ABC News . “I did this for them.”

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