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Trial of alleged Bryant School kidnapper begins

Philadelphia classroom and sexually assaulting her, is being delayed amid jury problems

THE MOTHER sat inside her car and watched as her daughter and son walked into Bryant Elementary School, believing that "her children were safe and where they were supposed to be," a prosecutor said yesterday in opening statements of the Christina Regusters trial.

By 3 p.m. on Jan. 14, 2013, the mother was told by a day-care worker from Heaven's Little Angels that her 5-year-old daughter was nowhere to be found, Assistant District Attorney Erin O'Brien told the jury.

"She [began] living every parent's worst nightmare," O'Brien said. Regusters, dressed in a long-sleeve knit sweater and gray slacks with her hair in a bun, sat at the defense table taking notes during O'Brien's opening statement.

Both sides gave opening statements yesterday and five prosecution witnesses testified.

Regusters, now 21, is accused of kidnapping the girl from her kindergarten class, stuffing her into a laundry bag and taking her to a house on Walton Avenue near 62nd Street, prosecutors say. She is believed to have entered the Cobbs Creek school wearing a Muslim burqa, similar to garb worn by the girl's mother.

Regusters is charged with aggravated assault, kidnapping, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse and related crimes. She's being held in lieu of \$4 million bail. (The *Daily News* is withholding the child's name because she is an alleged victim of sexual assault, and her mother's name, which may identify the child.)

Regusters' defense attorney, Fred Harrison, asked jurors to keep open minds during the trial. "You haven't [seen] the evidence yet," he said. "You've heard opening statements."

He told the jury that Regusters' father had sexually abused her when she was younger and that Regusters had been raped in 2012 by an unknown assailant.

While the mother learned about her missing daughter from a day-care worker, Bryant staff was soon figuring out that a student was unaccounted for, according to witnesses.

Staffers went back to the classroom to see if the girl was still there, noontime aide Andrina Seawright testified. She wasn't.

"This seemed like this was a problem," Seawright testified. She then walked over to administrators to say, "I think there's a situation."

Patrol Officer Floyd Jackson described what he found at the school when he arrived after 3:30 p.m. "Lots of staff was there. It was a chaotic atmosphere. No one knew what was going on," he testified. "Everyone was pointing fingers at each other."

When Regusters and the child got to the Walton Avenue house, Regusters showed her a photo of a man on her cellphone, O'Brien said.

"This is the man your mommy sold you to," Regusters allegedly told the girl, according to O'Brien. "This is the man who is going to do bad things to you."

Regusters allegedly removed the girl's glasses, placed a blindfold over her eyes, and forced her to remove her clothes and put on a T-shirt, O'Brien said. Then she allegedly forced the young girl under a bed and threatened that if she screamed, a macaw would "peck your eyes out."

Regusters sexually assaulted the girl with an unknown object and told her it was done by "the man," O'Brien said.

The child, now 7, is expected to testify at the trial, prosecutors say.

The family of the child has filed a federal lawsuit against the school district and that case is pending, the family's attorney, Tom Kline, said.