



Family of girl abducted from school files federal suit

Her smile may be "sweet and precious," but the memories the 6-year-old girl hides behind that smile of the day last year when she was abducted from her West Philadelphia school will cause a "lifetime of physical and emotional scarring," her mother's attorney says.

Lawyer Thomas Kline filed a civil lawsuit in federal court Wednesday on behalf of the girl and her mother claiming the School District of Philadelphia and the School Reform Commission failed to adequately train and screen the substitute teacher who allowed a stranger to take the girl out of school that day.

The suit also claims that the district failed to protect the girl from the actions of a dangerous person, namely, her alleged abductor, Christina Regusters.

Three defendants are named in the suit - the school district, the SRC and the child's substitute teacher that day, Reginald Littlejohn, who was suspended in the wake of the kidnapping. The suit is seeking in excess of \$150,000 in damages.

"I represent a precious little girl who was taken from a safety net in a classroom and had the most horrible things happen to her that day," Kline said.

According to police, on Jan. 14, 2013, Regusters, 20, an employee at an after-school program the girl attended, went to Bryant Elementary dressed head-to-toe in Muslim clothing and was able to take the child out of class without providing proper identification.

From there, police believe Regusters took the girl to a house where she was sexually assaulted before she was abandoned in an Upper Darby park clothed in nothing but a T-shirt. A Good Samaritan, Nelson Mandela Meyers, found the girl the next morning and called police.

Initially, authorities said there were at least three people who took part in the crime, but at Regusters' preliminary hearing in June, prosecutors said they had no evidence to suggest that she acted in concert with anyone.

Kline, however, said he believes Regusters did not act alone.

"I have remained optimistic that as we get closer to her trial that Miss Regusters will implicate the others who were involved," he said.

Kline hopes this civil suit will "shine a very high beam" on the need for reform in the district.

"You can have the best policies and procedures and practices on paper - which, by the way, the school district did not have - but unless or until they are followed with precision and vigilance, we could have another incident like this," he said.

Calls to school district officials for comment Wednesday were not returned.

The District Attorney's Office declined to comment on Kline's theory of additional coconspirators, but a spokeswoman said the facts and evidence have not changed since the preliminary hearing.

Lt. John Stanford, a police spokesman, said the department is not actively searching for any additional suspects in the kidnapping but he said if new information emerges, others could be charged.

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