

MONDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2015

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Woman who impersonated girl's mother to abduct her from kindergarten gets 40 years to life

By **MARYCLAIRE DALE** /Associated Press
OCTOBER 5, 2015

PHILADELPHIA — A girl abducted from her kindergarten classroom and sexually tortured during a bizarre overnight ordeal faced her kidnapper in court Monday and asked a judge to stop her from harming others.

"I think what she did to me was wrong, and I think she shouldn't do it to anyone else," the now 8-year-old said, standing beside her mother and speaking in a sweet, pipsqueak voice.

Former day care worker Christina Regusters was sentenced to 40 years to life by a judge who called the January 2013 crime "a horror show."

Regusters, 22, insisted Monday that her only role in the crime had been to take the 5-year-old from unnamed people and leave her half-naked the next morning on a cold, dark playground a few miles away. A stranger heard the child's cries before dawn and found her shivering under the playground equipment.

"I'm not a monster, I'm a very good person," said Regusters, who was convicted of kidnapping, sexual assault and other charges at a trial last summer. "I take full responsibility for what happened and doing absolutely nothing about it."

Regusters did not testify at trial and did not say Monday who else was purportedly involved.

Authorities believe she donned a Muslim dress and veil to impersonate the girl's mother at school and then posed as three different people to trick the blindfolded child into thinking a man committed the sexual assault.

Prosecutors sought a life sentence, saying Regusters had previously watched anime involving child torture and done research on how to destroy DNA evidence. The defendant later told a defense psychiatrist that she had been abused and neglected as a child and raped during a 2012 home invasion.

Regusters, then 19, worked at a day care center that the girl attended, and she sometimes visited her public school in West Philadelphia to collect children in the program.

Prosecutors believe she knew the child's teacher was on medical leave when she talked her way past a security guard and substitute teacher, saying she was taking the girl out to breakfast. The girl can be seen on security video walking out with an ostensibly pregnant woman.

Authorities believe Regusters ditched the Muslim dress and pregnancy disguise, and took the child to a home where she lived with relatives.

The girl was left with serious internal injuries, authorities said. Her family filed a federal civil rights lawsuit accusing the school district of "reckless indifference."

Their lawyer, Thomas R. Kline, noted that Regusters inferred others were involved but failed to name them when she had her chance Monday.

Philadelphia prosecutors said Regusters terrorized parents across the city who awoke to an Amber Alert about the girl's disappearance and feared their children might also go missing from school.

"It's like a horror show, being taken away from a parent, stripped naked, placed under a bed and tortured," Common Pleas Judge Jeffrey P. Minehart said Monday.

Defense lawyer W. Fred Harrison Jr. argued that Regusters "has suffered the same kind of things that (the victim) ... suffered."

"My client would not have wanted to visit that on this little girl," he said.