



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on January 28, 2011

Mother Jailed for Enrolling Kids in Another School District

Prosecutors charged that the Akron resident defrauded the school district by falsely claiming residence in the town of Copley, where her father lives. Williams-Bolar said she and her children lived part of the time with her father.

"My primary residence was both places. I stayed at both places," she told CNN in an interview at the Summit County Jail before her release. But the school district hired a private detective who followed her and videotaped her driving the children from her Akron residence to their Copley-Fairlawn schools. School department officials said Williams-Bolar was receiving quality education for her daughters without paying taxes to fund it. They asked her to pay \$30,000 for back tuition and when she refused, they took the case to court. The school district also charged both Williams-Bolar and her father, Edward L. Williams, 64, with grand theft in connection with documents concerning the children's residents. The jury could not reach a unanimous verdict on that charge and the case was declared a mistrial.



Copley-Fairlawn schools have received ratings of "excellent" and "excellent with distinction" from the state. The district provides free education to those living within its boundaries and accepts a limited number of outsiders as tuition students. School officials make an ongoing effort to identify and remove from their rolls non-paying non-residents and they encourage citizens to report non-residents attending the district's schools. There is a \$100 reward for information leading to the removal of a nonresident.

Williams-Bolar, who works as a teacher's aide at Akron's Buchtel High and attends college classes at night, said her downtown Akron neighborhood is a drug-infested, high-crime area and that it was for safety reasons that she began to reside "part time" at her father's home.

"When my home got broken into, I felt it was my duty to do something else," she told ABC News. She is pursuing a degree in education at Akron University, but a future teaching job as well as her current teacher's aide position could be in jeopardy as a result of her felony convictions. Judge Cosgrove became the subject of a public outcry when the verdict was announced, but she told the *Akron Beacon-Journal* that the prosecutors refused to consider reducing the charges to misdemeanors in pretrial meetings.

"I felt that some punishment or deterrent was needed for other individuals who might think to defraud



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the various school districts," Judge Cosgorve [told News 5](#), the ABC affiliate in Akron.

But the case has sparked protests from around the country over what many see as a punishment of out of proportion to the crime. Public outrage "went viral" on Internet, blogs, and Facebook after the case received radio and TV coverage, the *Beacon-Journal* reported, noting that the Akron chapter of the National Action Network, led by Rev. Al Sharpton, was soliciting donations on Facebook to help Williams-Bolar pay for an appeal. Thousands of names have reportedly been gathered in petitions on various websites, calling for a reduction of the sentence. Because Williams-Bolar is African-American and the Copley-Fairlawn schools are predominantly white, some have characterized the matter as a racial issue. "Parenting While Black: Ohio woman Jailed for Stealing an Education" said one headline on *The Daily Kos*.

"Facebook, Twitter and the blogosphere have been hopping with news about an Akron, Ohio mom jailed for sending her daughters to school in a suburban district where she did not live," said News One, a publication "For Black America." In Akron, a *Beacon-Journal* editorial denounced the sentence as an "unjust, even outrageous result" and argued that the school district should have found an alternative to criminal prosecution.

"If the schools wanted their tuition money, the avenue of a civil lawsuit was available," the editorial said, arguing that Williams-Bolar received "a punishment grossly out of line with her actions, even if she persisted in ways that others did not. Here is a single mother, with two girls, no previous criminal record, a teaching assistant at Buchtel High School, seeking to make a better life for her family, a few credit hours short of her teaching degree. Today she's a felon."

But Fairlawn resident Richard Levin, an attorney who served for 16 years on the Copley-Fairlawn school board, responded in a letter to the editor. "We taxpayers of the district are proud of our consistent support of high-quality education," he wrote "but we have no desire to see our tax money used for the benefit of those who are fraudulently being sent into our schools."



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