



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on April 26, 2011

Conn. Mother Faces Charges for Enrolling Child in Diff. School District

A homeless Connecticut mother faces charges of larceny and possible imprisonment for enrolling her six-year old son in a school in another town. Tanya McDowell, whose last known address was in Bridgeport, Conn., enrolled her son in Norwalk's Brookside Elementary School after claiming to live at a friend's address, and now faces charges for allegedly stealing nearly \$16,000 from Norwalk schools.



Fox News [writes](#):

Tanya McDowell ... is scheduled to be arraigned on charges of larceny and conspiracy to commit larceny for allegedly stealing \$15,686 from Norwalk schools. Prosecutors allege that figure is the value of her son's education at Norwalk's Brookside Elementary School between the time he was illegally enrolled in January and McDowell's arrest on April 14. If convicted, she faces up to 20 years in prison.

The case has drawn public attention, highlighting the plight of parents who wish to seek quality education for their children.

Gwen Samuel, founder of the Connecticut Parents Union, an educational lobbying group, has called upon the state of Connecticut to repeal the legislation, contending it penalizes parents for trying to obtain a better education for their children. She added,

This should've never happened. Do we really want to be punitive for this? We just cannot be the state that is stooping to this level. We can look at this and do it another way. This just should not be happening.

In February, the *Atlanta Constitution Journal* [addressed](#) this very issue when Ohio mother Kelley Williams-Bolar served nine days in jail on a felony conviction for tampering with records in order to get her daughters into a better school district than the poor one in which they were zoned. According to the *ACJ*, the case served as "evidence of the need for school choice ... What does it say when parents' options are so limited that they commit felonies to avoid terrible schools?"

In addition to the difficulties parents face when seeking quality education for their children, Samuel also contends that McDowell's dilemma highlights the plight of struggling American families who have



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been greatly impacted by the current financial crisis:

We need to look at homelessness and realize it's not just people living under bridges. Some people don't have a stable place to lay their head, and we need to be very sensitive to the fiscal crisis and the results of that. How do we assure this doesn't become a pattern?

Norwalk Mayor Richard Moccia defended the arrest, however, emphasizing that McDowell committed a crime by using her friend's public housing address to enroll her son at Brookside Elementary School, regardless of her reasons. Likewise, he pointed to McDowell's criminal history, comprised of drug arrests and a prison term for robbery and weapons offenses. "This is not a poor, picked-upon homeless person," he remarked. "This is an ex con, and somehow the city of Norwalk is made into the ogre in this. She has a [checkered] past at best."

Moccia adds that his office has received over 100 emails in support of McDowell accusing the city of being insensitive to her condition.

"We're a very compassionate city," the Mayor replied in response to the emails. "She knew how to post bond, she had a car — why didn't she send her kid to the Bridgeport school? This woman is not a victim and Norwalk is not an ogre. As far as I'm concerned, let them say what they want."

Instead, Moccia contends that McDowell's son is the only real victim in this case, as he has been "bounced around" the state's educational system because of his mother's actions.

Meanwhile, officials at Norwalk Public Schools have defended their actions, indicating that they were not motivated by the McDowells' homelessness, because they were unaware of that fact.

School officials reported that McDowell testified in the Norwalk Housing Court on January 11 that she and her son lived with a friend at 66 Priscilla Circle in Bridgeport, Connecticut. According to the officials, "She did not testify at that time that she was homeless. Sometime prior to January 19, 2011, Ms. McDowell registered her son in a public school in Bridgeport...Attendance records indicate that her son's last day at Brookside School was January 14, 2011."

The statement concludes, "The Norwalk Public Schools fully complies with the McKinney-Vento Act, which requires public schools to provide education for homeless students. In this case, according to her own testimony, Ms. McDowell and her son reside in Bridgeport, and we are aware of no evidence that she or her son is homeless."



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