

NOTE: "U.S. Rep. Jesse L. Jackson Jr., D-Ill., a son of the Rev. Jesse Jackson, also reacted. 'Courage is sometimes all too rare in politics, but today my friend John Kasich showed once again that it's something he's blessed with. He looked on Ms. Williams-Bolar from his heart and saw a child of God, not an offender, and offered her a second chance.'"



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Kasich cuts convictions in mother's school case

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By Alan Johnson

Rejecting the unanimous opinion of the Ohio Parole Board, Gov. John Kasich yesterday gave a "second chance" to an Akron mom who was jailed for fraudulently switching her children to a neighboring school district.

Kasich used his clemency authority as governor to reduce Kelley Williams-Bolar's two felony convictions for tampering with records to first-degree misdemeanors.

There are strings attached: Williams-Bolar faces monthly visits to the probation office, mandatory random drug testing, paying the cost of prosecution, and other requirements. Her attorney said she is already doing all those things as conditions of her probation.

In the end, Kasich's action means that Williams-Bolar's stated goal of becoming a teacher is again within her reach. She feared that felony convictions would make it difficult for her to earn a teaching certificate.

"When I first heard about this situation, it seemed to me that the penalty was excessive for the offense," Kasich said in a statement.

After a speech yesterday in Cleveland, Kasich said he is "very sensitive to the notion that we want our African-American community to have as much opportunity as we can. Now, what she did was wrong, but in my opinion, it did not rise to the level of a felony. ... I hope she will learn from this experience, and it will send a message across the state that when you don't do things by the book, there is a consequence to it. But I believe it was the right decision to give this woman a second chance."

David Singleton, the woman's Cincinnati attorney, said he called her as soon as he got word from Kasich's office.

“She was overjoyed. It was one of the best moments of my legal career. She was screaming, ‘Thank you! Thank you!’ over and over.”

Singleton added: “The governor showed a lot of courage in granting clemency in the face of a unanimous Parole Board recommendation that clemency be denied.”

Summit County Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh, whose office prosecuted Williams-Bolar at the request of officials of the Copley-

Fairlawn school district, said in a statement that Kasich “is not required to uphold a jury’s verdict, nor must he follow the Parole Board’s recommendation to reject clemency, even when that recommendation is unanimous.”

U.S. Rep. Jesse L. Jackson Jr., D-Ill., a son of the Rev. Jesse Jackson, also reacted.

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Earlier this year, the governor asked the Parole Board to review Williams-Bolar’s case and make a recommendation. He said at the time that the case “struck a deep chord” with him and his wife, Karen.

Williams-Bolar, 41, spent nine days in jail early this year after being convicted of falsifying records by using her father’s home address to enroll her daughters, Kayla and Jada, in Copley-Fairlawn schools. She and her daughters, now 17 and 12, respectively, live 2 miles away in the Akron school district.

During a 5 1/2-hour parole-board hearing on July 20, Williams-Bolar tearfully said that the safety of her daughters — not the quality of their education — was her motivation for falsifying records to switch them to a neighboring school district.

Dispatch reporter Joe Vardon contributed to this story.

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