

Judge orders boy's parents to keep quiet in gender case

by Kevin Mayhood

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The parents who have received international media attention by bringing to court the case of their child -- a boy who they say wants to be a girl -- have been ordered to no longer talk about the case.

Juvenile Court Judge Kay Lias yesterday issued a 14-page ruling in the case of Paul and Sherry Lipscomb and their 6-year-old son. The judge placed the parents under a gag order and issued other restrictions in the case.

The Lipscombs, who have said they want public scrutiny of the case, plan to appeal the decision.

Lias also extended the gag order to the child's foster parents and the lawyers involved. It prevents them from talking in public about the specifics and merits of the case.

The Lipscombs, who say they expect to divorce, said their son was taken from them by Franklin County Children Services last month because they were planning to enroll him in school as a girl.

They say a gender-identity disorder has been diagnosed in the child.

In its complaint, Children Services says the Lipscombs are not meeting the medical and psychological needs of the boy.

In her ruling, Lias ordered that the child not be shown to the media nor media reports be shown to him.

She lamented that she could not order -- but only request -- that neighbors, friends, family, teachers and the community help protect the child's identity.

"It is clear that there is great danger of potential future harm to this child during these proceedings," Lias wrote. "Yet, much of this potential harm is predicated on the child's future exposure to or knowledge of the media reports or his future knowledge that the community neither accepts him or his family, but labels and ostracizes them."

Lias, however, said the trial that is scheduled for November will be open to the public and be closed only when the child's medical and psychological history is discussed.

"I believe, if we can have the cooperation of not only the people in the courtroom but the community at large and the media, we can keep the proceedings open," Lias said in her ruling.

The Lipscombs have willingly given interviews on local, national and international television -- including Good Morning America -- as well as in the local and national press, such as Time magazine.

According to court documents and their own statements, the Lipscombs say they both suffer from bipolar disorder. Paul Lipscomb also says he has the same gender-identity disorder that he says his son has.

The parents say they have been painted as unfit because their son wears girls' clothing, plays with what are traditionally female toys and uses a girl's name at home. They have said they are allowing him to express his chosen gender and that the school and community should be accepting.

Rebecca Steele, a public defender appointed to represent the best interest of the child, has said in court that the child and parents have serious problems and that the gender-identity issue is a "red herring."

While in foster care, the child has not been showing symptoms of a gender-identity disorder, a representative of Children Services has said.

The Lipscombs are arranging for new lawyers to represent them because they now are at odds on some issues.

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