

Md. Courts Have Jurisdiction in International Custody Disputes

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ANNAPOLIS, Md. (AP) - The Maryland Court of Appeals has affirmed the jurisdiction of state courts in international child custody disputes, upholding the conviction of a woman sent to prison for helping take a child out of the United States despite an order giving the boy's American father custody.

The court heard arguments in the case and issued the ruling even though Afaf Khalifa, the boy's maternal grandmother, was paroled and allowed to return to Egypt in May.

The opinion handed down Tuesday rejected arguments by Khalifa's lawyers that her conviction was invalid because she was prosecuted for detaining a child outside Maryland. The opinion said state courts have jurisdiction because the act of depriving Michael Shannon of the legal custody of his son, Adam, took place in Maryland.

"It (the ruling) confirms the fact that the Maryland courts do have jurisdiction over these international abductions," Maryland Solicitor General Gary E. Bair said.

Michael Shannon had legal custody of Adam in August 2001 when Khalifa and her daughter, Nermeen Shannon, secretly took the boy and his younger brother, Jason, to Cairo. The father was later given custody of Jason by a Maryland court.

Khalifa was arrested in California in July 2002 when she returned to the United States for a vacation. At her trial, Michael Shannon appealed for a long sentence for the grandmother, saying his only hope of regaining custody of his sons was to keep her in prison until her daughter agreed to bring the boys back to the United States.

Shannon has asked Egyptian courts to honor the Maryland court's decision granting him legal custody of both boys and return them to Maryland. Jeffrey M. Leving, a Chicago attorney helping Shannon pursue legal action in Egypt, said a hearing is scheduled in September in Cairo.

"We're asking the Egyptian court to recognize the custody awards and return the children to the father," Leving said, noting that Shannon has not seen his sons in three years.

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