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BREAKING NEWS NEWS

Jordanian teen sent to Chicago for detainment after being held in Texas



By ELYSSA CHERNEY
CHICAGO TRIBUNE | JAN 31, 2017



A 16-year-old boy traveling on a Jordanian passport is being held in Chicago after being detained at a Houston airport for two days amid the chaotic rollout of President Donald Trump's executive order on travel restrictions, according to Texas attorneys working to reunite the boy with his family.

Mohammad Abu Khadra, a student at Katy High School in Texas, arrived Saturday at George Bush Intercontinental Airport, where he was detained, having to sleep in a chair, and then moved Monday to Chicago, according to his attorneys. Khadra was returning from a trip to renew his visas in Jordan.

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The Office of Refugee Resettlement confirmed to Khadra's attorneys that he's being held in Chicago, according to Anisa Thobhani, one of his lawyers. Government agencies have not given his lawyers a reason why Khadra was detained.

"We don't know the details of what happened or why he got held up," Thobhani said. "He's a minor. He's alone. He doesn't know where he is. He doesn't even know if the family is trying to get a hold of him or not."

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Khadra lives in Katy, Texas, with his older brother, who has a green card. His parents are in Jordan. Khadra has a visitor's visa, his attorneys said.

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Attorneys haven't been able to talk with Khadra in the days since he was taken into custody. It will take at least another three to five days before their paperwork is processed and they are allowed to communicate with him.

The attorneys said they believe the situation is connected to Trump's executive order, which suspended the U.S. refugee program and froze immigration for seven majority-Muslim countries. Jordan was not included in the order.

Muslims from any country appear to face more scrutiny in U.S. customs now, said immigration attorney Ali Zakaria, one of the boy's lawyers.

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"My experience talking to the client (the brother), my observations at the airport as a volunteer and my discussions with other attorneys around the country leaves me to believe that Customs and Border Protection at the airport is pulling all Muslim travelers, even those not from the seven listed countries, for secondary inspection and questioning them and reviewing their documents for three to nine hours," he said.

Khadra's brother could not immediately be reached.

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Zakaria said officials have to separate minors from the general population, but he doesn't know why Khadra was taken to Chicago.

His firm is first trying to reunite Khadra with his brother. Then they will take a deeper look at what happened, ^{ADVERTISEMENT} he said.

echerney@chicagotribune.com

Twitter @ElyssaCherney

Topics: Donald Trump



Elyssa Cherney



Elyssa Cherney is a general assignment reporter for the Chicago Tribune, specializing in child welfare. She previously covered criminal courts for the Orlando Sentinel and contributed to the team that was named a Pulitzer Prize finalist for reporting on the Pulse nightclub shooting in 2016. Elyssa is a graduate of Northwestern University.

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