

Charge: Woman held teenage illegal immigrant as slave

Immigrant was sent to the home by church agency.

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Shackleford

A Charlotte woman has been indicted on charges of forcing a teenage illegal immigrant into slavery.

In the indictment, handed down by a grand jury last week, authorities said the woman starved the youth, who had been placed in her home, and made him clean yards, sell goods and alcohol and sleep on the floor of her mobile home.

The woman, Lucinda Lyons Shackleford, said she will make a first appearance in court today on charges of forced labor and document servitude. She has not been arrested. If convicted, she could go to prison for more than 20 years and face a fine of up to \$500,000.

"No one should be forced to live in a world of isolation and servitude as this victim was, particularly in a country that prides itself on freedom," Brock Nicholson, acting special agent in charge of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Georgia and the Carolinas, said in a press release.

On Sunday, Shackleford said that the accusations are lies made up by an illegal immigrant trying to stay in the United States.

"They're telling me I kept him in prison. They told me I starved a child," Shackleford said Sunday, describing her talks with authorities about the teen. "He's lying to immigration all because he wants papers."

The indictment did not give the teenager's age, but Shackleford said he is "about 16."

Both the teen and his father are illegal immigrants, according to the indictment, which didn't give their names or other identifying information. Neither could be reached for comment Sunday.

Shackleford said they were her neighbors and asked for help when they had immigration trouble. Authorities placed the boy with Shackleford while he awaited a judge's decision.

Shackleford says immigration officials began deportation proceedings against the teen after he was arrested for drug possession. As he waited in jail for an immigration judge to decide his fate, the boy's father begged Shackleford to take his son in, she said.

According to her indictment, Shackleford agreed to take the boy in February and provide him with clothes and food. The boy spent weekends with his father, who agreed to pay Shackleford a total of \$1,200, plus expenses.

The boy was placed by Lutheran Family Services, which conducted a check of Shackleford's home. In a statement, LFS Chief Operating Officer Myra Griffie said: "LFS cooperated fully with the investigation and was informed there were no concerns regarding services provided."

Shortly after the boy moved in, according to the indictment, Shackleford told him he owed her \$450 and had to work to pay it off. The indictment said Shackleford made the boy perform odd jobs for other people who lived in the mobile home park, off Old Statesville Road.

He cleaned 60 yards in the mobile home park and Shackleford's own home, worked on cars and sold beer, snacks and ice cream from Shackleford's home, the indictment said. Shackleford required the boy to sleep by the door so he could serve the people who came to buy the goods she sold, some coming as late as 1 a.m. He continued to work for her because she repeatedly threatened to call police and immigration officials and have him and his father jailed and deported, according to the indictment.

Shackleford said the boy's father came to her home one night crying, asking her to take care of his son.

She said he wasn't forced to sleep on the floor and she never withheld food. He had a 32-inch television in his room and went to church on Sundays with his family, she said. "I thought I was doing something to help somebody," she said. "I was ignorant of a lot of the facts."