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Ga. Judge Jails Muslim Woman Over Head Scarf

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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ATLANTA (AP) -- A Muslim woman arrested for refusing to take off her head scarf at a courthouse security checkpoint said Wednesday that she felt her human and civil rights were violated.

A judge ordered Lisa Valentine, 40, to serve 10 days in jail for contempt of court, said police in Douglasville, a city of about 20,000 people on Atlanta's west suburban outskirts.

Valentine violated a court policy that prohibits people from wearing any headgear in court, police said after they arrested her Tuesday.

Kelley Jackson, a spokeswoman for Georgia Attorney General Thurbert Baker, said state law doesn't permit or prohibit head scarfs.

"It's at the discretion of the judge and the sheriffs and is up to the security officers in the court house to enforce their decision," she said.

Valentine, who recently moved to Georgia from New Haven, Conn., said the incident reminded her of stories she'd heard of the civil rights-era South.

"I just felt stripped of my civil, my human rights," she said Wednesday from her home. She said she was unexpectedly released after the Washington-based Council on American-Islamic Relations urged federal authorities to investigate the incident as well as others in Georgia.

The group cited a report that the same judge removed a woman and her 14-year-old daughter from the courtroom last week because they were wearing Muslim head scarves.

Jail officials declined to say why she was freed and municipal Court Judge Keith Rollins said that "it would not be appropriate" for him to comment on the case.

Last year, a judge in Valdosta in southern Georgia barred a Muslim woman from entering a courtroom because she would not remove her head scarf. There have been similar cases in other states, including Michigan, where a Muslim woman in Detroit filed a federal lawsuit in February 2007 after a judge dismissed her small-claims court case when she refused to remove a head and face veil.

Valentine's husband, Omar Hall, said his wife was accompanying her nephew to a traffic citation hearing when officials stopped her at the metal detector and told her she would not be allowed in the courtroom with the head scarf, known as a hijab.

Hall said Valentine, an insurance underwriter, told the bailiff that she had been in courtrooms before with the scarf on and that removing it would be a religious violation. When she turned to leave and uttered an expletive, Hall said a bailiff handcuffed her and took her before the judge.

Associated Press writer Kate Brumback in Atlanta contributed to this report.

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