



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on May 20, 2011

Secret Service Questions Boy, 13, Without Parent

The U.S. Secret Service pulled a 7th grader out of class for questioning at a Tacoma middle school about a posting he made on Facebook, prompting outrage from the boy's mother who says she was not consulted by authorities. Now, the story is attracting international attention.



The social-networking message that prompted the incident warned that the reported assassination of Osama bin Laden could possibility spark blowback. "I was saying how Osama was dead and for Obama to be careful because there could be suicide bombers," the boy, Vito LaPinta, [told a local Fox News affiliate](#) following the Secret Service interview.

About a week after the original posting, the child was summoned from class to the principal's office at Truman Middle School. When he arrived, a Secret Service agent in a suit walked in and told the boy that his Facebook message "indicated" that he was a "threat toward the President."

Meanwhile, a school security guard called the boy's mother, Timi Robertson, to let her know what was going on.

"My phone rings and I look at it. It was the number to his school and I answered it and it's the school security guard just giving me an FYI, you know, 'For your information, just to give you a heads up, the Secret Service is here with the Tacoma Police Department and they have Vito and they're talking to him,'" Robertson said in an [on-camera interview](#) with a local reporter.

The Secret Service questioning was allowed to proceed before she arrived because, according to the school district, Robertson hadn't taken the call "seriously." Robertson, however, called that assertion a "blatant lie."

She explained that upon hearing the news, she raced to school. "I just about lost it," she said. "My son — my 13-year-old son, who's a minor, who's supposed to be safe and secure in his classroom at school — is being interrogated without my knowledge or consent, privately, by the Secret Service."

The interrogation went on for 30 minutes. "I was very scared," the boy told Q13 Fox News. When Robertson finally arrived, the agent promptly ended the interview and informed the child that he was not in trouble.

But for his mom, that's not enough. Robertson said that even though she didn't have the money to file suit, she wanted people to know what happened to her family.

"For me, it's not about what my son did or didn't do — it's the way they handled it," Robertson explained. "He's still a child."

The Secret Service did not respond to requests for comment. But the story has attracted scrutiny across



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America and even [abroad](#), with [international wire services](#) and [news outlets](#) reporting the incident.

The U.K. *Daily Mail*, for example, ran an article headlined "[War on ... teenagers: Boy, 13, interrogated by the SECRET SERVICE for posting message about Bin Laden on Facebook](#)." The piece cited several other examples of apparent overreactions by federal agents charged with protecting the President.

American critics ridiculed the hysteria, too. Blogger Matt Welch of Reason.com [suggested](#) Facebook had become "make-work for the Secret Service." After noting that the boy said he would be more careful about what he posted on Facebook, Welch responded "Mission Accomplished!" Other critics [said](#) the interrogation without parental consent violated the Constitution.

Parenting blog Babble.com also commented on the implications of the incident. "Parents needn't worry about monitoring their kids' activity on the Internet," [noted](#) Meredith Carroll. "Apparently Big Brother is doing it for them."

The social-networking service Facebook has come under fire numerous times in recent years for [acting as a sort of intelligence-gathering tool](#) for the U.S. government. Founder Julian Assange of the anti-secrecy group WikiLeaks [charged](#) in a recent interview that Facebook was "the most appalling spy machine that has ever been invented."

Photo: Vito LaPinta



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