

**Prepared Statement by Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa  
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee  
Hearing on “Abducted Abroad: Exploring the Plight of International Parental Child Abduction  
and its Effect on American Families”  
April 24, 2018**

Good morning. Thank you all for coming here today to share your stories of how international parental child abduction has impacted your lives. We appreciate your courage and admire your persistence.

Today, we will talk about international parental child abduction and its impact upon thousands of American citizen children and their families. This issue occurs in every State in our Union. It does not discriminate, and it impacts both hard-working American men and women.

The phenomenon known as International Parental Child Abduction occurs when one parent unlawfully takes their child from the United States to a foreign country, with a desire to keep them there indefinitely.

While this phenomenon is not new. The abduction of American citizen children has rapidly increased in the last decade, largely due to the ease of international travel. It’s estimated that between 2008 and 2017, more than 11,000 American citizen children were abducted and taken abroad.

That’s roughly 1100 kids per year who are taken from their parents. Unfortunately, many of these American citizen children are never returned.

Being abducted and taken overseas by a parent can have devastating and lasting effects on an American child’s mental, physical, and emotional well-being.

According to a report from the U.S. Department of State, abducted children are at “risk of serious emotional and psychological problems.” Those problems include anxiety, eating disorders, nightmares, mood swings, resentment, fear, and guilt.

These issues don’t stop once the child is returned. Once they are back—if they are even returned at all—many of these children continue to suffer a range of emotional issues. The traumatic impact of an international abduction on children is limitless.

But the American children citizens aren’t the only ones who suffer. The left behind parent also suffers trauma.

Many of these parents often discover their child has been abducted by a spouse or significant other in the most horrific way: they simply return home one day and their child is gone.

This horrible discovery begins what is, for many parents, a lifetime of struggles where they feel paralyzed by helplessness. All of us with children can imagine the shock, and daily horror, of not knowing if our child will ever be returned or even if we will ever see them again.

That's the daily reality for many left-behind parents. Even if their children return, the pain never goes away, and they often worry if their child will be taken from them again.

Traditionally, the federal government has tended to view international parental child abduction is either a private family issue or an issue to be handled at the state level. It's only in the last few decades that we've started taking targeted, incremental steps to combat this issue.

And while these are welcome steps, the simple fact is our laws don't operate well together, and as a whole, aren't effective in preventing parental abduction.

For example, the International Parental Kidnapping Act makes it a felony to abduct a child from the United States. But, individuals are rarely prosecuted for a host of reasons, many of which are beyond Justice's control. And even if they are, their conviction still doesn't guarantee the child's return.

In 2001, we mandated that both parents had to consent to the issuance of a passport for a child, unless one parent had sole and exclusive custody of the child.

But in an era of increased multi-cultural and multi-national marriages, many children possess both an American and foreign passport, making these passport control measures practically useless.

The Immigration and Nationality Act makes any alien who kidnaps an American citizen child inadmissible, and their inadmissibility continues until the child is returned. This is actually one of the more effective tools we have, and this gives the left-behind parent immense leverage to negotiate their child's return.

Still, given the fact that the inadmissible person is almost always the parent who abducted the child in the first place, even this provision is not entirely effective.

Finally, just four years ago Congress enacted the most comprehensive piece of international parental child abduction legislation to date, the Sean and David Goldman Act.

The Goldman Act provided the State Department with a number of tools to pressure foreign governments to return American citizen children. These tools start with public condemnations and the cancellation of official visits, and can include the withdrawal, limitation, or even suspension of U.S. development and security assistance.

Sadly, besides a single public condemnation 3 years ago, the State Department to my knowledge has refused to use any of these tools to secure the return of American citizen children. That's

unacceptable, and I look forward to hearing a detailed explanation about this from Assistant Secretary Risch.

As these examples demonstrate, there's more Congress and the Executive Branch can do to end the kidnapping of American citizen children. I hope today's hearing is the beginning of that conversation.

During the course of this hearing we're going to hear from two panels. First, we'll hear from the Department of State and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

I'm hoping State will be able to give us some insight into the number of American children who've been abducted abroad, steps they're taking to prevent future abductions, and why they aren't using more of the Goldman Act's tools to return our children.

From Customs and Border Protection, we're going to hear about their program to prevent the unlawful departure of American citizen children, and how Congress can take steps to strengthen and improve that program.

For our second panel, we're going to hear the testimony of two parents whose children were abducted abroad, Dr. Chris Brann and Dr. Noelle Hunter.

Their powerful stories highlight the impact international parental child abduction has on families and children, and I hope their testimony will help guide us as we discuss solutions to end this crisis.

Finally, before I turn it over to the Ranking Minority Member for her opening statement, I want to take a moment and recognize all of the left-behind parents who are attending today's hearing. I want you to know we hear you, we have great empathy for you, and we are committed to seeing the return of your children.

I now recognize the Ranking Minority Member for her opening statement.