

**Dr. Noelle Hunter**

Introduction by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell

Senate Judiciary Committee

April 24, 2018, 11:00am

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Feinstein, Fellow Senators:

Thank you for allowing me to be here this morning to introduce Dr. Noelle Hunter – an incredible person and mother, and someone I am proud to call a dear friend.

As my colleagues likely know, the Senate recently passed by unanimous consent Chairman Grassley's resolution recognizing April as "International Parental Child Abduction Month" to bring awareness to the harm caused by this issue. As a cosponsor, I was proud to join members of this panel in supporting the resolution, and I am grateful for the committee's acute interest in the important subject of this morning's hearing, which causes great harm to many families in our nation.

I am also glad that Mr. John Clark, the president of the Center for Missing and Exploited Children, is here to add his perspective. His organization has a well-established reputation on this subject.

In 2012, Dr. Hunter, of Morehead, Kentucky, first contacted my office with a desperate plea for help. She found herself living a parent's worst nightmare. Just after Christmas the year before, her daughter, Muna, was abducted and taken to Mali in West Africa. As my staff and I learned more about her story, we became determined to help.

I'll let Dr. Hunter tell you the specifics of her long and painful journey to reunite with Muna. But due to her perseverance and years of work with Congress, the State Department, the Justice Department, and the Mali government, Dr. Hunter was finally able to bring Muna home.

I had the incredible opportunity to be at the Northern Kentucky airport in 2014 to greet Dr. Hunter and Muna when they finally were able to return to this country together. After their years-long struggle, I got

to share in the indescribable joy of this homecoming. And now, with Muna and her sisters, Rysa and Rachel, Dr. Hunter's family is whole once more.

To this day, I am so proud to say that I was part of Dr. Hunter's team to bring this little Kentuckian home.

So this morning, I look forward to the committee's discussion on how to collaborate with the administration and stakeholders to enable more successful outcomes like Dr. Hunter and Muna's. This family's story shows us that a parent's determination, coordinated with the right resources can overcome even the direst of circumstances.

Unfortunately, we are all aware that not every family's experience has the same happy ending as that of Dr. Hunter and Muna. For many other parents, their trials continue. But I believe that this story of success can help guide our policies for the future.

In the years since, Dr. Hunter has used her experience – one of pain, frustration, and ultimately joy – to help other families facing similar crises. By co-founding the iStand Parent Network, Dr. Hunter and her colleagues are passionate advocates on behalf of parents going through one of the most difficult periods in the lives of their families. We can all learn something from her, and I look forward to the insights she can provide this committee as we develop strategies to bring more children, like Muna, back home.

Mr. Chairman, thank you once again for allowing me to introduce Dr. Noelle Hunter.

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