

Testimony testify in favor of HB1103 and SB924

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My name is Nicole Priola and I am here to testify **in favor** of HB1103 and SB924 the Maryland Child Abduction Prevention Act. My nephew August was abducted from Hawaii to the country of Greece on September 5, 2017. My brother Anthony was born and raised here in Maryland. His immediate family still resides in Maryland and the abduction has affected us all in every aspect of our lives.

His now ex-wife a Greek Citizen used the U.S. courts by making false allegations filing a temporary Protective Order against Anthony to have August removed from the home so she could leave the county with their 2-year-old son. Anthony knew what she was planning to do and informed the local police and courts. The local police did nothing. When the Protective Order was dropped, Anthony attempted to file a missing person report with the local police and was told August was not missing, but with his mother. He later found out that his ex-wife had left Hawaii and was at LAX with August. He contacted the police at the airport and was told to have his local police contact the airport officers so they could stop her from getting on the flight. She was able to leave the country with August.

Anthony has full physical and legal custody of his son who is now 4. He has been fighting to get him back for 908 days and counting. **Although Greece is a signatory of the Hague Convention of International Parental Abduction**, we have not found one documented case where Greece has returned a child abducted by a parent.

Anthony has been in Greece for court several times since August's abduction. The first Hague decision by a Greek Judge made a custody order stating that it would be hard for the mother to see her child if he is returned to the U.S. My brother appealed that decision and was scheduled to appear in Court in Greece on November 1, 2018. The Court allowed his ex-wife to postpone the appeals hearing to January 31, 2019 while Anthony and my mother were present in Greece. On that date, Anthony appeared in the Greek court again. The Court postponed his hearing to February 14, 2019 even after his lawyer informed the Court that his return flight was on February 11. He is now at the Supreme Court scheduled to be heard in **October 2020**.

Anthony has had little communication with his son, August. Although his ex-wife has been ordered to call him 30 minutes a day, she fails to do so on a regular basis. On one occasion, while Anthony was in Greece after a visit with August, I got a phone call from him in tears. He said, "I had to watch her drag August on the ground by his arm out of the place while he cried and screamed for his daddy. He had no coat or shoes in 30-degree weather. I could do nothing. I just had to watch her do this to my son."

There has been no help from anyone in our government, including the Hilo Hawaii State Prosecutor, the Hilo Local Police, The FBI, The U.S. Office of Children's Issues, U.S. Representative Tulsi Gabbard, and more.

This is just a small portion of what Anthony has gone through trying to have August returned after being internationally abducted. If there were more laws and education on parental abduction, not only to our judges but also to lawyers and law enforcement, many parents would not have to go through this situation. Passing HB1103/SB924 will not help my brother or nephew, but it will help prevent future cases like his.