



March 2, 2020

Honorable Delegates and Senators
Maryland General Assembly
90 State Cir
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Maryland Child Abduction Prevention Act (SB924/HB1103)

Dear Delegates and Senators,

I serve as Executive Director of Bring Abducted Children Home, a nonprofit organization formed in 2011 and dedicated to the immediate return of internationally abducted children being wrongfully detained in Japan. We also strive to end Japan's human rights violation of denying children unfettered access to both parents. I am also a founding partner in The Coalition to End International Parental Child Abduction whose mission is to unite organizations to work passionately to end international parental kidnapping of children through advocacy and public policy reform. Our vision is a world where children are safe from international kidnapping by a parent.

In this capacity I have testified to and briefed the U.S. Congress six times on the ongoing abduction crisis. I have led meetings in the White House and at the Secretary of State's policy planning office. Also I have testified in California family court as an expert witness and in support of state legislation.

I fully support the passage of the Maryland Child Prevention Abduction Act (SB924/HB1103) as a positive step toward better preventing international parental child abduction.

In my own case I was granted custody of my son in May 2007. Three years later, on June 20, 2010, I dropped my son, "Mochi" Atomu Imoto Morehouse, off to begin a weeklong visit with, his mother. He was 6 ½ years old.

That is where the endless nightmare began. Six days later, I received a phone call that no parent wants to receive. It was the police. My son and ex-wife had been reported missing. I knew immediately what happened. She succeeded in what she had threatened to do. She had kidnapped our son to Japan.

In that moment my life was shattered. How could this happen to my little boy? I did everything I could think of to prevent it. There were even passport and travel restraints in the court order to bar her from going outside the state with him. When the Seattle Consulate of Japan denied her passport request she simply went to the Japanese consulate in Portland, which issued her one in violation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Passport issuance policy.

Sometime people say to me, at least you know he is safe with his mother. He may be somewhere in Japan with her, but he is not safe. He is at risk. She has willingly and intentionally kidnapped him to a foreign land with the intent of alienating him from me and everyone he knows.

Imagine being a child and your mother steals you away to a foreign country and then tells you your father does not want you anymore or that he is dead. Your whole life is now built on a foundation of lies.

This is not what a healthy, nurturing parent does. It is child abuse and it is a federal crime under the International Parental Kidnapping Crime Act of 1993 (18 U.S.C. 1204).

In 2014 and again in 2017 I won landmark rulings in Japan. Their court declared my U.S. sole custody has legal effect. My ex-wife has no legal custody rights there and they also cited her admission of illegal acts of passport fraud and forgery. There was no intent to offer justice, though. It was simply Japan's continuity principle at work. It does not matter how a child ends up with the abductor in Japan, they will not uphold laws and treaties to return children to their rightful home. In the end the court refused to reunite Mochi and me. I don't even know as where he is being held.

Kidnapped American children's true voices have been silenced. They need to be heard. In the beginning of my most recent legal battle in Japan, my son, thirteen at the time, was asked by his attorney, "do you ever think about your father?" As the tears rolled down his face he replied, "sometimes I dream of him at night."

The last time I hugged him, the last time I heard his voice was Father's Day 2010.

I wish I could say that my story is unique. It is not. As noted in U.S. Senate Resolution 487 (S.Res.487) more than 11,500 children were reported abducted from the United States between 2008 and 2018. Maryland ranks #11 in the nation according to figures we obtained from the U.S. Department of State. Most kidnapped children never make it home according to responses written responses from Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Carl Risch.

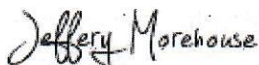
Parents seeking travel abroad and their attorneys may cite the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction as a remedy should the parent not return the children from a foreign visit. Judges may believe in this as a perceived safeguard. In reality it is naive. The Hague Abduction Convention is simply a framework that is implemented on top of existing law in each signatory country. There are no international sanctions for a country failing to uphold the intent of the treaty.

Parents are left on their own to navigate foreign courts if they are able to put together the resources needed to mount a legal battle overseas. In countries such as Japan court orders are not enforceable without the voluntary compliance of the kidnapping parent.

Restraining children at risk from traveling outside the U.S. and entering the children into the U.S. Custom and Border Protection's Prevent Abduction Program is the best current tool stop future kidnappings from happening.

Protect the children of Maryland from being victims of international parental abduction by passing The Maryland Child Abduction Act (SB924/HB1103).

Sincerely,



Jeffery Morehouse
Executive Director