

Missing Children - 1981

Issue

The cases of Adam Walsh, six years old, from Florida, Etan Patz, six years old, from Manhattan, and those of many other children who have been abducted or murdered or mysteriously disappeared have been seriously impeded in attempts for their rescue and/or identification by the lack of a systematic nationwide approach to solution of such crimes. State police and the FBI have been forced to observe waiting periods before they may enter such cases. There is little or no provision in existing law for cooperation among the states or across national borders to trace children who may have been forcibly abducted. Existing provisions for immediate clearance of information about these cases is inadequate. Action is often hopelessly delayed by the lack of these provisions.

Background

Senator Paula Hawkins from Florida and Senator Paul Simon of Illinois and more than fifty colleagues have introduced the Missing Children's Act, Bill #3781, in the House, and Bill #1701 in the Senate, to rectify this problem by establishing a nationwide computer clearing house for information on such cases. This bill would also eliminate waiting periods now required of state and FBI forces before they can begin to act.

If such provisions had been in effect, it is possible that the death or suffering of untold numbers of children might have been prevented. Knowledge of the fact that some action is being taken would also greatly alleviate the anguish of families whose child is missing.

This legislation has passed the Senate on voice vote and also has substantial support in the House. However, it has failed immediate passage because it has been considered in connection with other legislation, such as budget appropriations, which are being held up by threat of veto or other consideration. The existing FBI system of records concerning missing persons might well be utilized in setting up the proposed computerized system for researching and clearing information for use by and with the aid of local law enforcement bureaus.

Resolution

- 1) We request that Sisterhoods in other countries associated with NFTS study the provisions in their own laws which might implement the spirit of this proposal.
- 2) We urge that our members specifically in the United States act to influence their representatives in the House and Senate to hasten the high priority consideration and implementation of the Missing Children's Act in whatever manner is possible.