

**Testimony of Patty Wetterling  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
Hearing on “Helping Law Enforcement Find Missing Children”  
March 2, 2011**

Good morning, Senator Klobuchar, Senator Grassley, and other members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. I want to thank Senator Klobuchar for inviting me to participate today to talk about my experience as the mother of a missing child.

When you have a missing child, you enter a world that no one wants to know.

On October 22, 1989, our world fell apart when my son Jacob was kidnapped. He was biking home from a convenience store with his brother Trevor and best friend Aaron when they were confronted by a masked gunman – only a half-mile from our house. Although I had been a stay-at-home mom, and my husband and I knew a lot about many things related to children, I knew nothing about how to proceed in this situation.

The response from law enforcement was phenomenal. The FBI headed our search, but worked alongside the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, the St. Joseph Police Department, the Stearns County Sheriff’s Department, and the Tri-County Major Crimes Unit. As a parent, it was all so confusing. I didn’t understand the different jurisdictions...and I didn’t care. Instead, every searching parent only cares about one thing: Are you part of the team? Are you looking for my child?

We had help and support from so many places: other agencies, law enforcement from across the state, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the National Guard, search dogs, horses, helicopters, and congressional leaders. Minnesota Senators David Durenberger and

Rudy Boschwitz included Jacob's photo on their mailings to constituents. Even the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) circulated Jacob's and other missing children's photos in their tax booklets!

That is the response we need for every missing child.

After Jacob's abduction, I helped start a parent-to-parent mentoring program called Team HOPE, which is now a program offered by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Through Team HOPE, I met hundreds of searching parents – including parents who had lost their children through family abductions. I learned that often, parents whose children are taken through family abductions get less support than those of us who suffered non-family abductions. I learned about the trauma of children who were parentally abducted. I met adults who were kidnapped as children who finally found their searching parent when they grew up, and who spoke painfully of the many challenges that they continue to face because of the abduction. The bottom line is... you can't steal children.

An abducted child has so much taken from them. Even in parental abduction cases, we cannot forget how much those children lose: They lose their other parent and sometimes siblings, their homes, their pets, their toys, their friends and relatives, their teachers, all their familiar surroundings; in some cases, they even lose their identities because their abducting parent changes their name and birth date. Sometimes they were told their other parent died. They live in isolation, in sadness, and in fear. They live a lie.

In both family and non-family abductions, we searching parents have all felt that someone knows where our children are. We believe that one day, someone might sense something strange or unusual. We hope and pray every day that someone will call in the lead that we need to return our children. We believe that any lead, any additional piece of information might help bring our children home.

In the case of family abductions, there is a government agency that might have additional information about missing children. In some cases, we know that abducting parents continue to file tax returns where they claim the missing child as a dependent. In these cases, the IRS might have more recent address information for a missing child than law enforcement does. However, because we have very strict taxpayer privacy laws, the IRS is not currently able to share that information with law enforcement.

I believe this is a problem that needs to be fixed. I know how important it is for parents of missing children to believe that every government institution that can help them get their child back is able to do so. We must send a message that you cannot steal children – not your own and not someone else's.

I know that Senator Klobuchar has introduced the Access to Information about Missing Children Act to help law enforcement get limited taxpayer identity information from the IRS in cases involving missing and exploited children. I am supportive of all efforts to give government agencies the authority they need to share information with law enforcement in these cases. I also know it is important to be able to share critical information between federal, state, and local law enforcement. As I mentioned earlier, parents of missing children don't care about jurisdictional boundaries – they care about getting their child back.

As a country, we are getting better and better at responding...thanks to improvements like AMBER Alerts, and better training and heightened awareness, more children are returning home. We should all thank the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children for their steadfast commitment to our children and their high recovery rate.

Through my personal experience and my interactions with countless families who have also suffered the pain of a missing child, I have come to know this: Somebody almost always knows something that could

help us find the missing child. We need to let the whole world know that we will never stop looking for our children and our hope will not die. My family and I hope to see Jacob again. We hope that the man who took him will be stopped from ever harming a child again. We hope that our children's children will be allowed to grow and flourish in a world where they know that there are more good people than bad and that they will have the knowledge that when good people pull together, amazing things happen.

I am so grateful for every one of you; good people who are pulling together, seeking to address this hole in the search for missing children. You can have a tremendous impact by ensuring that all agencies are able to work together to find our children. Again, we need to make a clear statement that you cannot steal children, not your own and not someone else's. If legislation can save just one child and that child is your own, it is worth it!

Thank you for inviting me to testify today.