

8 February 2023

Rebekah's Legacy  
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To Whom It May Concern,

I am the mother of Rebekah Grace Rose Barsotti, Missing Person July 20, 2021 in Mineral County, Montana. Although this event did not occur in the state of North Dakota, I would like to publicly support Bill SRC 4007. It is my understanding that this bill will ultimately support SAR training, education, response and communication between the Law Enforcement and SAR teams.

My daughter went missing along the Clark Fork River, which is a river in the U.S, travelling through Montana and Idaho, approximately 310 miles (500 km) long. The largest river by volume in Montana. It also has a major interstate (I-90) and railroad tracks that runs adjacent. Just as the terrain in North Dakota is vast, rugged, difficult to maneuver and cover in a SAR effort so is Montana.

Canada, Idaho, North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Montana all would benefit from participating in a cohesive program regarding SAR efforts. It is my hope your state will be the beacon of light that promotes this.

In my daughter's event, Mineral County Sheriff Office isolated the search to the "assumed" point of entry. I place "assumed" in quotation marks because NO ONE saw my daughter or her beloved dog at this site. They only found some of her personal items there. Two Bear Air was called in the next day. Flathead County SAR was called in days later as well as 10 days later Missoula SAR was implemented. 10 days. Mineral County Sheriff Office didn't even informed their own Mineral County SAR Organization that there was a missing person till days later. Mike Johnson, of Montana River Guides and his staff were on the water searching for my daughter, my son flew in from Pennsylvania to assist in the water search efforts. I had been informed one week out on July 28<sup>th</sup> that Mineral County Sheriff Department had "other things to do" and that it was "too hot" to continue search efforts for my daughter. I literally went to KPAX studio and pounded on the doors till someone responded and I exercised my right as a citizen of these United States to request help from the community. Mind you, I am distraught that my daughter IS MISSING. I have NO SAR experience. I have no one that I know personally in Montana to call on. I also posted on Social Media for the need of assistance. We met with the Sheriff and asked about Civil Air Patrol, Montana SAR and he stated they would be of no use to us and would not be invited. They both require notification within 48 hours of the event, which we were not aware of at the time. I hope and pray that the Sheriffs in your Counties possess and portray more professionalism than what we experienced in Mineral County, Montana.

On August 9, 2021, Ross Butterfield, Deputy Chief with Northstar K9 Search and Rescue out of Golden Valley Minnesota reached out to me personally. Within hours, Captain Bill Burt from Missoula County Sheriff Department "Invited" their SAR team to participate. Missoula County SAR also participated but their equipment was antiquated and limited. Wings of Hope from Madison, WI also participated in the search. We had state of the art drones, sonar, cadaver dogs (that were

certified every 2 years) and divers. They arrived a full 3 weeks after my daughter went missing. Wings of Hope located a Sonar image of what could have been my daughter. A private citizen with sonar capabilities also located a sonar image. The County insisted on using their own divers and came up with nothing. Because of a power struggle and other complications with politics and laws regarding the waterways, the rescue mission was aborted.

Similar to the experience reported by Amy Jo Seagren-Hunt in regard to Missing Person Joby Seagren, in the end evidence provided to from community volunteers and Northstar K9SAR/Wings of Hope to Law Enforcement seemed to have no value. In the process critical time was wasted.

In March 2022, we personally hired Wings of Hope and Northstar K9 SAR to come back for one more search in the river. They had been in Montana two separate times before March 2022. Once in August 2021 for my daughter and once in October 2021 for Taylor Simonson. They were familiar with the terrain and the Clark Fork River. After searching the river for 30 days in March 2022, over 87 miles from a few miles upstream to point of entry to Thompson Falls, they came up empty handed. At one point, Brad Smith, Chief Officer of Wings of Hope informed me that Rebekah would most likely be found in pieces. In May 2022 a fisherman found a body on the riverbank, completely intact, yet she apparently travelled the Clark Fork River for 30+ miles. This is important because the dive teams could not maintain the integrity of their gloves and suits because of the sharp rocks in the Clark Fork River. It is important because 6 days after my daughter went missing her beloved dog was found 10 miles downstream, lacerated from the river rocks. The State Crime Lab informed us the DNA was not amplifiable, dental records were used to identify my daughter.

From communication I have seen, the Montana SAR Organization was appalled that a team from out of state came into the beloved state of Montana to search the Clark Fork River. Because of politics, Montana SAR was either unable or unwilling to come forward. Time is lost with politics and red tape. I only share this so, the State of North Dakota can learn and apply such lessons.

I narrate my story to hopefully give you insight to the anguish, the despair that as a Mom I felt while I had to initiate search teams for my daughter. Thank God an individual from the community had some experience and assisted in coordinating efforts. Unfortunately, the SAR team from the community was informed they could only search in the water. They were not allowed on dry ground. That caused major concerns regarding the limited scope of the investigation and eventually the citizens from the community became disheartened because they swept over the same spots time and time again without results.

This very same story could take place in the State of North Dakota. I implore you from a Mother's heart.....there are grants, there are volunteers, there are people in your state and surrounding states that are physically able and willing to participate in SAR efforts as Volunteers. Give them the opportunity to receive the training and guidance they need to be successful. Provide the structure to bypass politics and red tape. When a life is on the line, red tape takes up too much time. My husband was in the military and he was appalled at the red tape in the Civilian world regarding our search for our daughter. He said when they were looking for a fellow soldier, there was no red tape. You took every precaution, but you searched.

I urge each and every representative of the State of North Dakota to vote YES for SCR 4007. Be the Light that guides the surrounding States to implement similar legislation.

I leave you with this.....a mother's empty arms can be filled with other things, her mind can be filled with memories, her heart cannot. Please vote "Yes" to save the next life.

With all my love and compassion,

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