

Date: 1 - 21 - 2025

What: SB 2184 (Time Taken - Time Back)

Who: Dorothy Kuester

Retired Early Childhood Educator

Williston School District: 38 years teaching experience

Nana to three precious grandsons (ages 6, 4 and 2)

I am here today to testify in favor of SB 2184 (Time Taken - Time Back).

In the summer of 2023, my daughter in law stole my three grandsons. She was gone for eight days. She convinced my son that she would come back home with the children if he moved out of the house. They would be temporarily separated, and she would allow him visitation while they worked on their marriage. Our son complied and moved out of the family home. When she returned, she changed locks, bolted gates and installed security cameras.

From August to late December of 2023, our son had very little contact with his children. She did allow him visitation on Sunday afternoons from 1:00 -5:00 pm. Without our son's knowledge, she filed 27 combined Police reports and CPS reports claiming that our son was physically and sexually abusing his children. She would call the police to her house on Sunday after the children had returned from visiting their father. She would report many types of abuse, scratches and bruises of a physical nature. She also reported sexual abuse. She reported that the children were being returned to her with evidence of abuse that was not there in her care. The police would write a report and then she would follow up the claim to CPS Monday morning.

Our grandsons have been interviewed by police, counselors, doctors and social workers at the tender ages of 5 and 3. They have been asked to show private areas of their bodies to professional individuals they should trust and respect. They have been traumatized by these accounts and are afraid and concerned when they discover a scratch, bruise or bump on their body.

My daughter-in-law knew just how to do this. Even though she was a stay-at-home mom, she holds a license to practice Social Work in the state of North Dakota. She had worked as a Social Worker for Williams County before the children were born.

On Dec 22, 2023, my son was called to a CPS meeting in Williston. He was informed of the CPS file and was told that the case was closed and all 27 of her reported allegations were unconfirmed. The social worker stated in the report that my daughter-in-law did not perceive reality accurately.

The very next day, my daughter in law, with the help of her parents, backed a trailer up to the family home and removed many furniture items. She took the three children and crossed the state line into Montana to Glasgow, where her parents have a home. There is no support system there for her as her parents currently own and operate a business in the Williston community. My son quickly confirmed that she was there and filed Contempt of Court and filed for Divorce. The Valley County Sheriff delivered those papers to her around Christmas of 2023. She made no attempt to return to Williston.

The Interim Court Hearing was Feb 2, 2024. On that day she returned to Williston. It had been 49 days since my son had seen his children. At the hearing, the judge did nothing about the Contempt of Court. The judge had the complete unredacted CPS file in his possession. Four weeks later my son received the judge's determination. His wife would be allowed to stay in Glasgow. He would have visitation every other weekend and certain holidays and birthdays. The judge did nothing about the Contempt of Court or the CPS file. This order remained in place for eight months until the divorce trial was scheduled.

I ask you to please give consideration and support this bill. It is my belief that it will aid in deterring a parent from stealing their children. If we look at this from the perspective of the children and care about their emotional development, wouldn't we come to the conclusion that a 49 day separation from their father, great grandmas, nana and papa, aunts, uncles and cousins would be extremely detrimental. At the ages of 5, 3 and 1 their understanding of this separation was nothing short of abandonment.

This is an important bill in the lives of many children that are stuck in the middle of a parent or parents that can't seem to put their children first. If this bill was in effect at the time that my daughter in law stole the children, there would have been a consequence for her actions. She would be held accountable and be faced with decreased parenting time to make up for the 49 days she took away from my son.

As a retired teacher, I have seen first-hand how children have suffered at the hands of an irresponsible parent or parents. I never in my wildest dreams thought that I would live this nightmare. Please consider the children. They are the innocent victims of divorce. Please give this bill a due pass out of committee.