



Recommendations to the U.S. State Department to Enhance IPCA Prevention

*Submitted to the U.S. Dept. of State Bureau of Consular Affairs Office of Children's Issues
May 18, 2015*

According to State Department statistics, *at least* 3 American children are abducted by a parent *every day* from U.S. borders. The number of these abductions would **significantly decrease** were appropriate prevention mechanisms to be implemented. As is made clear in the 2014 International Child Abduction Prevention and Return Act (ICAPRA), “parental awareness of abductions in progress, rapid response by relevant law enforcement, and effective coordination among Federal, State, local and international stakeholders are critical in preventing such abductions. Clearly, coordinated prevention efforts are key to protecting American citizens from suffering the tragedy of International Parental Child Abduction (IPCA).

As the responsible agency for IPCA prevention and return in the United States, we the members of iStand Parent Network, turn to State for guidance on existing mechanisms, and seek your consideration of our recommendations for increasing their effectiveness. We have previously provided you with a list of questions for discussion. In addition, we would appreciate your consideration of the following suggestions and seek your commentary as to their possible effectiveness.

Extend the Scope of the Children's Passport Issuance Alert Program

Previous recommendations to State have included a high-risk abductor list program that could operate similarly to the Prevent Departure list program but would apply to U.S. citizens.¹ iStand would recommend that State extend the reach of the Children's Passport Issuance Alert Program (CPIAP), in keeping with policy and procedures already established by the Department of Homeland Security through Customs and Border Patrol, and through the ICAPRA Prevent Departure Program, in order to establish such a list.

As it stands, CPIAP exists to alert the enrolling guardian when an application for a passport for the enrolled child is received in order to verify his/her approval prior to its issuance. The existing registration process for CPIAP confirms the legal guardianship of the applicant over the enrolled child(ren). We recommend a voluntary inclusion process by which the enrolling parent can register the child(ren)'s names and identifying information (as already included in the CPIAP registration paperwork) in a separate high-risk list for U.S. children who are at-risk for abduction or wrongful removal. Having the names of the children at-risk for abduction, and not the likely abductor, eliminates the possibility of the vulnerable child being taken abroad by another adult.

¹ Highlights of GAO-11-602, a report to Subcommittee on Aviation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives June 2011 COMMERCIAL AVIATION Program Aimed at High-Risk Parent Abductors Could Aid in Preventing Abductions.



Strengthen Cooperation with NCMEC to Expand the Amber Alert Program to Prevent IPCA

Finally, we strongly recommend that OCI utilize its partnership with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) to expand its Amber Alert program to assist in the prevention of IPCA. Amber Alert has been successful in IPCA cases in the most recent two years. Additionally, DHS checks the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) Missing Persons File and has partnered with other agencies to distribute AMBER Alerts at airports if child abductions meet certain criteria.²

Because the Amber Alert program is voluntary, and the Amber plan for each state is determined on an individual basis, we recommend that State initiate proactive communication with Amber Alert program coordinators in each state to educate them about the various Federal legislative determinations regarding the threat of IPCA and the urgency for immediate response. Additionally, we recommend State encourage Amber Alert program coordinators to ensure that children suspected of parental child abduction receive substantial consideration for the issuance of an Alert.

Mandate Authorizing Documentation for International Travel of Minor Children

We recognize and assert that the most effective prevention tool for IPCA is the routine enforcement of the right afforded Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) to demand authorizing documentation for the international travel of minor children. We contend that the existence of a policy allowing CBP to demand such documentation, providing officers the authority to detain travelers who do not possess such documentation, counters any arguments about the infringement of routine document verification on the freedom of travel.

We further note that, due to documentation requirements for minor children at most international destinations, parents traveling abroad with minors are likely to already possess these necessary authorizing documents in order to meet the exit requirements of their foreign destinations. Even our border countries of Canada and Mexico both maintain strict exit controls for minor children. An adult U.S. citizen may travel to Canada with a child utilizing only a U.S. birth certificate, but would not be able to return to the U.S. with that child without court issued documentation or a notarized letter authorizing their departure from Canada.

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Jerry's Army

End Abductions Now!



² *Ibid.*