



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Patty Ritchie

## Ritchie Announces Bipartisan Bill Aimed at Stopping Parental Kidnapping

PATTY RITCHIE May 19, 2015

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### **Measure Would Make it a Felony for Non-Custodial Parent to Abduct a Child**

State Senator Patty Ritchie, continuing her legislative efforts to protect innocent children, today unveiled bipartisan legislation to help stop the tragedy of non-custodial parent kidnappings, which the FBI says account for over 75 percent of the hundreds of missing child cases in the state every year.

**[WATCH VIDEO OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE BY CLICKING HERE](#)**

Joined by representatives of the Rochester-based National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and a survivor of a non-custodial parent kidnapping, Senator Ritchie (R-Heuvelton) and Assemblymember Shelley Mayer (D-Yonkers) held a press conference to announce legislation that would make parental abduction a felony, and give law enforcement additional tools to investigate and solve missing children cases.

“No parent fears anything more than the abduction of their child, and while cases of stranger abductions will always generate headlines, the fact is that 75 percent of all abductions involve a non-custodial parent or family member,” said Senator Ritchie. “The scars and trauma from these cases are as deep and lasting as those involving stranger abductions. By enacting this legislation, we can give law enforcement and prosecutors the tools they need to help safely return abducted children and hopefully, reduce the occurrence of these tragic cases in New York State.”

Scott Berne, who was abducted as a child by his own mother, following his parents’ divorce, and secreted across state and even international borders, spoke at the press conference about the experience, and how his mother burned down her former family home, and twice hired “hit men” to kill his father, who held legal custody of the boy.

The FBI estimates that more than 200 children are victims of non-custodial parental kidnappings in New York each year. Current law includes a nearly impossible standard of proof for prosecutors to bring more serious charges against parental kidnappers. The lawmakers’ bill would change the standard to show that a non-custodial parent removed a child with the intent of concealing him or her for a “prolonged period.”

The bill, S.4680, includes an exemption for those who feel that the child or their own life is in danger, such as in case involving domestic violence.

“Children should never become victims in a fight between their parents, and this bill is another effort to make sure that it is the child’s best interests that always come first,” Senator Ritchie said.

Earlier this week, Senator Ritchie unveiled another bill to toughen penalties in the case of stranger abductions. That case was prompted by the kidnapping of two sisters in the Senator’s hometown of Heuvelton last year. The girls were returned safely, and their abductors recently pleaded guilty to multiple charges.