



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
**WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM**

BILL NUMBER: <b>HB 1904</b>		DATE: <b>1/30/2024</b>	
COMMITTEE: <b>Children and Families</b>			
<b>TESTIFYING:</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES			
<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>ARNIE C. AC "HONEST ABE DIENOFF"</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:		SUBMIT DATE: <b>1/30/2024 12:00 AM</b>
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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>DIANE REDLEAF</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>708-927-8169</b>	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: <b>LET GROW</b>		TITLE: <b>LEGAL CONSULTANT TO LET GROW</b>	
ADDRESS: <b>801 FAIR OAKS</b>			
CITY: <b>OAK PARK</b>		STATE: <b>IL</b>	ZIP: <b>60302</b>
EMAIL: <b>diane@letgrow.org</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>	SUBMIT DATE: <b>1/29/2024 8:51 AM</b>	
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**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF DIANE L. REDLEAF, J.D.** Legal Consultant to Let Grow Heard by the Missouri House Children and Families Committee Jan. 30, 2024      My name is Diane Redleaf. I am a lawyer and the legal consultant to Let Grow. I am a graduate of Stanford Law School. I am also a member of the American Bar Association Center for Children and the Law Steering Committee for its National Alliance for Parent Representation. I have been a Lecturer in Law on Child Welfare and Civil Rights Litigation at the University of Chicago Law School and have authored numerous articles, including the National Association of Counsel for Children's Redbook Chapter on parents' rights in investigations. and a book, They Took the Kids Last Night: How the Child Protection System Puts Families at Risk (ABC-Clio, 2018). The Definition of "Neglect" Should Include Serious Harm, not Cases Where Children Were Not Endangered, Data Shows Nationally, the rate of child neglect allegations is going up while actual findings of neglect are going down. According to the most recent HHS Child Maltreatment Report (for 2021), over 7,000,000 children (approximately 10% of all children) were reported to child protection authorities but the numbers of substantiated cases are dropping, along with rates of serious physical and sexual abuse cases. That's good news, but the bad news is that amorphous neglect claims have not dropped. Instead, they make up an increasing proportion of child protective services caseloads nationally. I reviewed data in the HHS report and determined, by my own calculations, that Missouri currently refers more cases for full investigation than the national average (60% vs. 28.4%) and it finds abuse or neglect to be present at significantly lower rate than nationally (8% v 28%;) which all suggests that Missouri resources are being disproportionately used in cases investigations that yield limited child protective value and suggests, too, that families might be better served in other ways. Eight States Have Already Passed Reasonable Independence for Children Laws. Reasonable childhood independence legislation first passed in Utah in 2018. There, the bill passed unanimously. A follow-up study by Dr. Peter Gray reported in Psychology Today reported that parents in Utah express relief at having the rights afforded in that law. In 2021, both Texas and Oklahoma, passed reasonable independence laws by overwhelming margins. These measures had broad bipartisan support. Both the Texas and Oklahoma gained traction because these measures address the needs of low-income families who need flexibility and support, not punitive investigations of their parenting when they are making the best judgments they can make on behalf of their kids. See, e.g. [https://www.muskogee phoenix.com/opinion/editorials/other-views-poverty-does-not-equal-neglect/article\\_587d9e0b-89f6-51e0-ae7-474fca460483.html](https://www.muskogee phoenix.com/opinion/editorials/other-views-poverty-does-not-equal-neglect/article_587d9e0b-89f6-51e0-ae7-474fca460483.html) and <https://www.oklahoman.com/story/opinion/2021/03/26/opinion-bipartisan-bid-save-childhood-oklahoma/6986563002/>. In 2022, Colorado unanimously passed its reasonable independence law. And, in 2023, four states across the political spectrum passed similar laws—they are Connecticut, Illinois,

Montana, and Virginia. Virginia's law, <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?ses=231&typ=bil&val=sb1367> which passed unanimously too, is especially close to the proposal now before the committee, and it is one of our model laws. The proposed legislation H.B. 1904 recognizes that letting a child be outside alone or home alone does not constitute neglect unless it is unsafe. Without this additional clarity in the law, mandated child abuse reporters often decide to call the hotline and citizens call the police out of uncertainty rather than genuine concern. But investigations by police and child protective services are traumatic and can waste precious state resources too, even when no abuse or neglect is found. This legislation will tighten the guardrails against unwarranted investigations while at the same time allowing those who genuinely believe a child is unsafe to contact the legal authorities. In this way, the law provides parents much-needed leeway to be able to judge when their children, whom they know best, are mature and capable of such activities as walking to school, playing outside, or being home alone. Parents from all different walks of life and communities, and especially communities that are under-resourced and stressed, need to be able to decide for themselves when their children can do things on their own. When citizens in the community can't tell what is lawful or unlawful, this creates a chilling effect on reasonable parenting. Tightening the law in the way HB 1904 proposes has been good policy in the 8 states that have already passed similar laws and will be good policy for Missouri children and families too.



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>JEFF SMITH</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>314-323-0915</b>	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: <b>MISSOURI APPLESEED</b>		TITLE:	
ADDRESS: <b>PO BOX 1865</b>			
CITY: <b>JEFFERSON CITY</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>65102</b>
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: <b>1/30/2024 12:00 AM</b>	

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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>LAURIE V. SNELL</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: <b>lsnell@planetkc.com</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>1/29/2024 3:51 PM</b>
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IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1904 (Amends Section 568.060 RSMo) By LAURIE V. SNELL, Attorney at Law (Mo Bar #41978) As an attorney that represents parents and families in Jackson County Family Court and have for more than 26 years, I can attest first-hand to the fact that this legislation/amendment to Section 568.060 is needed. As you may not know, in Missouri poverty often gets conflated with neglect. When a child abuse/neglect hotline is called on a poor or marginalized family the discrimination against them is instant. As you also may not realize, Missouri is a really tough place to try to parent freely or to try to parent in this social-media-frenzy-society – at least it is hard to try to parent without scrutiny and judgment over every action/inaction as parents. The long-standing presumption with Children's Division and at Family Court is that any amount of unsupervised or alone time for developing children is neglect -- period. However, the scrutiny and judgment that happens around this after a hotline call really only hurts poor and marginalized families because the hotlines are not called against white, affluent and privileged families. Great parents who do nothing more than leave their children alone a short time or encourage them to play outside alone are literally losing custody of their children, simply for letting their children be children and giving them some independent/alone time. Without the added protections afforded by this bill, Missouri parents are not protected from someone else's judgment call about their own kids. House Bill 1904 – which would amend Section 568.060 RSMo – will be the solid reference that families and their advocates need and can use to help eliminate the bias AND remind Missouri's Children's Division Investigators/workers, Judicial Officers, Guardians Ad Litem and others that their predispositions against natural parents exercising their own authority over their children's independent activities and alone time is unlawful, discriminatory and won't be tolerated. Simply put, House Bill 1904 provides for Missouri parents what they need – a statute to point to which provides them a clear standard of fairness to give their Investigator/Judge/Commissioner/Attorneys. Please advance House Bill 1904 – a much needed amendment to Section 4568.060 RSMo -- so that Missouri Families can be themselves! Thank you, Laurie V. Snell



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>LENORE V SKENAZY</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: <b>Lskenazy@yahoo.com</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>1/26/2024 4:41 PM</b>
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Jan. 26, 2024 Esteemed Children and Families Committee Members: This is regarding HB 1904, the so-called "Reasonable Childhood Independence Bill," which I am in favor of. My name is Lenore Skenazy. After my column "Why I Let My 9 Year Old Ride the Subway Alone" landed me on every talk show from The Today Show to Dr. Phil, I founded the book, blog and movement Free-Range Kids, which has grown into the non-profit Let Grow. At Let Grow, we believe in safety: Helmets, seatbelts, carseats... We just don't believe kids need a security detail every time they leave the house. And yet, despite crime coming down about 50% since its peak in the '90s (and it is STILL lower, even with the COVID-era uptick), many kids today are driven from activity to activity, and plenty more spend hours on the couch, staring at a screen. There's a river of reasons for this, but one is that some parents worry that even if they know their kids are capable of walking to grandma's, someone else might consider them "neglected" and call 911. They are scared by stories of parents whose confidence in their kids was mistaken for neglect. Parents like Kari Anne Roy, who let her 6-year-old play outside within view of the house, but was investigated for neglect when a passerby called the cops. Natasha Felix let her kids, 11, 9, and 5 play at the park across from her apartment and she, too, was investigated for neglect. And there's the famous case of Danielle and Alex Meitiv who let their kids, 10 and 6, walk home from the park together and were investigated not once but twice. And that's not to mention the parents who have little money, leaving them no choice but to trust their kids with independence as soon as they believe the kids are ready for it. This makes overly broad neglect laws into a social justice issue: Who can AFFORD to helicopter parent? Not everyone. But childhood freedom is not just a parenting issue. It's a health issue. As children's independence has been going down, childhood obesity, anxiety, and even suicide have been going up. A Reasonable Childhood Independence Bill would reassure Missouri parents that giving their kids some old-fashioned freedom -- by choice OR economic necessity -- will not be mistaken for neglect. Neglect is when you blatantly disregard your child's safety and welfare. Not when you trust them to start becoming part of the world. Let the authorities use their precious resources to investigate TRUE cases of neglect, not parents who give their kids the kind of childhood most of us grew up with. Yours, Lenore Skenazy President, Let Grow Inc. Author, "Free-Range Kids" New York, NY Lenore@LetGrow.org 646 734 8426



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>REGISTERED LOBBYIST:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>LISA PANNETT</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
REPRESENTING: <b>ARMORVINE</b>		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY: <b>JEFFERSON CITY</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>65101</b>
EMAIL: <b>lzpannett@yahoo.com</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>In-Person</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>1/29/2024 9:59 AM</b>
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**This bill is fundamentally sound and good for the people.**



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>PETER GRAY</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: <b>grayp@bc.edu</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>1/28/2024 6:35 PM</b>
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Testimony of Peter Gray Research Professor in Psychology and Neuroscience, Boston College in support of MISSOURI HB1904 I'm a research professor of developmental psychology at Boston College who has published books and many academic articles on the value of children's independent play and exploration for their psychological as well as physical development. I'm also first author of an introductory psychology textbook use in universities throughout the world. Over the past several decades we have, as a society, increasingly deprived children of freedom to play, roam, and in other ways act independently of direct adult supervision and control. Over the same decades we have seen huge increases in rates of anxiety, depression, and even suicide among children, teens, and young adults. My research and that of others convinces me that there is a cause-effect relationship between these trends. Children need independent activity to develop the mental qualities that allow them to cope successfully with the inevitable stressors of life. One way to think of this cause-effect relationship involves the concept that psychologists call internal locus of control, which is the internal sense of being able to solve one's own problems, deal with the bumps in the road of life, and, more generally, take charge of one's own life. Research reveals that people of any age with a weak internal locus of control are far more likely to fall apart in response to life's inevitable stressors than are those with a stronger internal locus. Research also reveals, no surprise, that as social constraints on children's independent activity have increased over decades, young people's internal locus of control has become ever weaker. So, we have here a cause-effect chain: Reduction in independent activity ? a weaker internal locus of control ? increased susceptibility to anxiety and depression. This is just one way to understand the harmful effects of our strong societal constraints on children's freedom. We have reached the point where even eleven- or twelve-year-olds are not allowed the freedoms that were once available to children as young as five or six, such as freedom to walk or bike to school or play in the neighborhood without the immediate presence of an adult. I have heard from many parents who would love to give their children more outdoor freedom, which they know would be good for them, but do not do so because of fear that they might be charged with child neglect. There is no magic age at which a child suddenly becomes responsible, capable of self-management. Responsibility grows, like a muscle, with exercise. As children grow older, from about age 4 on, they need ever increasing levels of independent activity. The best judges of what is safe or not for any given child are the child's parents, who know that child and the neighborhood in which the child might play or explore. We need, once again, to start trusting parents to make that judgment. I am the lead author—along with two other prominent child development researchers—of an article published recently in the Journal of Pediatrics, titled Decline in Independent Activity as a Cause of Decline in Children's Mental Wellbeing. The article summarizes multiple lines of research evidence that our banning of children from independent activity is a major cause of the record levels of anxiety, depression, and suicide we are seeing today in young people. It also offers some routes for addressing this problem, the most central of which is to empower



parents to use their direct understanding of their children to decide what the child can or cannot do safely. You can access a pdf of the article here:

[https://www.petergray.org/\\_files/ugd/b4b4f9\\_f2cb98d004af4ebf9644c8daa30b040e.pdf](https://www.petergray.org/_files/ugd/b4b4f9_f2cb98d004af4ebf9644c8daa30b040e.pdf) support HB 1904

because, although it will not correct all the effects of the shifts away from independence that have occurred in recent decades, it will help by empowering parents to make reasonable decisions regarding their own children's freedom. Utah passed a similar bill several years ago, and I received

emails from parents there, afterwards, about the liberating effect it had for them and their children. You can see quotes from a few of those emails in an article I published about the new law on my

Psychology Today blog here: [https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/freedom-](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/freedom-learn/201908/legislation-and-public-policy-aimed-restoring-childhood)

[learn/201908/legislation-and-public-policy-aimed-restoring-childhood](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/freedom-learn/201908/legislation-and-public-policy-aimed-restoring-childhood) Peter Gray, Research Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at Boston College. Email [grayp@bc.edu](mailto:grayp@bc.edu) Phone 508 740-7968. March Jan.

29, 2024



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>REGISTERED LOBBYIST:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>SCOTT A. WOODRUFF</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>540-338-5600</b>	
REPRESENTING: <b>HOME SCHOOL LEGAL DEFENSE ASSOCIATION</b>		TITLE: <b>DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY</b>	
ADDRESS: <b>PO BOX 3000</b>			
CITY: <b>PURCELLVILLE</b>		STATE: <b>VA</b>	ZIP: <b>20134</b>
EMAIL: <b>scottw@hslida.org</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>1/29/2024 12:20 PM</b>
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FROM SCOTT A. WOODRUFF, DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AND LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY Home School Legal Defense Association supports HB 1904, the reasonable independence bill. We have seen far too many inappropriate reports of abuse-neglect where children were safely playing outside or riding their bicycles. These reports force social workers to initiate an investigation or assessment and thus divert their energy away from children who truly need their help. These also traumatize parents and may even make children fearful to play outside. This bill will allow social workers to screen out (not investigate) well-intentioned but misguided hotline calls that truly involve no appreciable danger to children. This issue disproportionately impacts the homeschool community because homeschooled children commonly play outside during hours when public school children are inside a school building or within a fenced playground. This prompts many unnecessary calls to social services from people who don't understand that homeschoolers engage in outside play on a different timetable from others, and in locations public school children would not be playing.--Respectfully submitted--



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>TIMOTHY FABER</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: <b>timothy@ephesians412.com</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>1/29/2024 9:04 PM</b>
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This is a good piece of legislation because it will allow kids to be kids; and it also provides them the necessary freedom to develop the skills necessary to become responsible adults. Our society has become obsessed with safety and protection to the point that parents hover over their kids so much that the children never have opportunity to grow and learn on their own. Sometimes this is so severe that even universities refer to some as "helicopter parents". These helicopter parents – and their ilk – need to be grounded so that the children can take flight themselves. Such freedom will allow these kids to develop such skills as decision making, conflict resolution, problem solving, creativity, and more....I encourage you to pass this bill.



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>INDIVIDUAL:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>DANA ADAMS</b>		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: <b>nonigirl@yahoo.com</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>1/26/2024 8:41 PM</b>

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**As a parent and grandparent i vehemently oppose this bill. Anyone should be concerned that a bill of this nature has even been written. It's full of opportunities of abuse with no oversight.**



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<b>WITNESS NAME</b>			
<b>BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:</b>			
WITNESS NAME: <b>TAYLOR JONES</b>		PHONE NUMBER: <b>573-751-1330</b>	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: <b>DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES</b>		TITLE: <b>DEPUTY LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR</b>	
ADDRESS: <b>221 WEST HIGH STREET</b>			
CITY: <b>JEFFERSON CITY</b>		STATE: <b>MO</b>	ZIP: <b>65101</b>
EMAIL: <b>Taylor.Jones@dss.mo.gov</b>	ATTENDANCE: <b>Written</b>		SUBMIT DATE: <b>1/30/2024 8:04 AM</b>
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**Available for Questions for the Department of Social Services**