

Susan McLain
State Representative
District 29



March 19th, 2019

Dear Chair Keny-Guyer and members of the committee:

I am writing to you in support of House Bill 2771 which would direct the Department of Justice to ensure that judges receive training regarding international custody disputes. While I am unable to be present for the hearing, I wanted to take the opportunity to share why this bill is so important to the safety and well being of Oregon children and families.

The problem this bill is working to correct came to my attention through a constituent. A mother in my district was incarcerated and lost custody of her children. While this is not an uncommon occurrence, what happened next was astounding. A judge awarded custody of her children to an ex-spouse living in Mexico. This man was legal parent but not a blood relative of the children, and in his home the children were abused and eventually ran away. My constituent went to Mexico to collect her children, but when she returned home, DHS again removed the children from her care. DHS has tried to help my constituent to petition the court to keep her children in the US. The Washington County courts have denied these petitions, and sent the children back to the abusive home in Mexico, stating that because the abuse took place there, Mexican authorities should deal with it. It is absolutely heartbreaking for me to imagine a mother being forced to watch her children be sent away in any context, but to know that your children are being sent to another country and to a home where they face abuse is intolerable.

I am sure judges in Washington County and across the state have the best interests of our children and families at heart. However, without proper knowledge of the issues that arise from international custody disputes, devastating problems like those my constituent faced will continue to occur. We need to make sure that judges have the proper training so they can be aware of the problems associated with international custody disputes, BEFORE sending a child out of the country.

Thank you for your consideration of HB 2771, this bill has the potential to stop heartbreaking situations like the one I have described from occurring. I urge you to vote in favor of HB 2771 and send it to the floor with a do pass recommendation.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Susan McLain". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Representative Susan McLain