

A slap on the hand could lead to murder

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— In a 2002 press conference, President George W. Bush said "The kidnapping or murder of a child is every parent's worst nightmare. Today I call on all federal and state and local law enforcement agencies and our communities and our citizens to work together to do everything in our power to better protect our children."

Now, four years later, things seem to be worse than ever. Every state enforces the law its own way. Is this working? Not so far.

Perhaps we should start with less leniency from our judges. A New York State Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers' web site states "Judges think long and hard about the sentences they impose – often agonizing over a year here and there – to do everything they can to make the sentence fit the crime and the defendant..." If these judges are "agonizing" over their decisions, then why, after having been urged not to release Kenneth Hinson, a convicted sex offender in South Carolina, did a judge free him only to have him kidnap two 17-year-old girls at a South Carolina home earlier this month and rape them in an underground dungeon? We hear cases like this frequently and it doesn't seem these judges agonized much at all over these cases.

In our own hometown, Caitlin Wooten, an Ada High student, was killed last year after her murderer had been released on bond. Caitlin became the victim of her mother's former boyfriend, who then committed suicide. He had been arrested earlier for kidnapping Caitlin's mother, but was released after paying \$20,000, or 10 percent, of his \$200,000 bail. Laws such as Caitlin's Law, which is aimed at strengthening bail laws by requiring persons charged with the violent crime of kidnapping to prove they are not a public danger before they may post bail, may help. This law also allows for an electronic notification system, called Victim Identification and Notification Everyday (VINE) to be put into place statewide in order to notify victims when offenders move through the criminal justice system. This is a step in the right direction for Oklahomans. "It sends the message that Oklahoma will not tolerate this sort of senseless violence because we will protect our families and communities through passing sound laws in this state," State Sen. Susan Paddack said. So, Oklahomans are better protected. But what about the rest of the U.S.?

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