



Written by [Lenore Skenazy](#) on June 30, 2023

Let Freedom Keep Ringing After July 4

Independence Day won't end on July 5 for families in Virginia, Connecticut and Illinois this year. They've got a huge stretch of freedom ahead.

"Ever since the law passed, we've been thinking about it so much," said Evelyn Hackel, a naval architect and mother of Elsa Hackel, age 12.

What law?

When Elsa was 9 and walking home from the library in Falls Church, Virginia, the police knocked on her front door before she even got her coat off. They told her parents she was too young to be outside alone.



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"There were four cops," Evelyn recalls — more than had shown up when her friend was assaulted.

Evelyn and Elsa both testified in the Virginia legislature this winter in support of the so-called "Reasonable Childhood Independence" bill. It clarifies that kids have the right to some unsupervised time — and parents have the right to give it to them, without getting investigated for neglect. "Neglect" is only when you put your child in serious, obvious danger — not any time you take your eyes off them.

The bill had bipartisan sponsorship. In February it passed both Virginia chambers — unanimously. This spring similar bills passed in Illinois and Connecticut, also unanimously.

Clearly, this is a country fed up with having to treat kids as Ming vases, only inside and guarded. The revolution began in 2018 when Utah passed what was originally called the "Free-Range Parenting" bill. Then in 2021-22, Texas, Oklahoma and Colorado followed Utah's lead: three red states and a purple.

But this year "it's been a bit of a blue wave," says Diane Redleaf, legal consultant to Let Grow, the nonprofit promoting childhood independence that has been helping to pass these bills.

The law appeals to politicians across the spectrum "because we all want what's best for our kids," said State Rep. Travis Simms, a Democrat in Connecticut who co-sponsored the bill with State Rep. Tom O'Dea, a Republican. Simms recalled how proud he felt when he started running errands for his mom. "Regardless of whether we were 5 or 20, we all had our part to play." That's child development gold.

In Illinois, the bill was particularly welcome because a confusing clause in the state law made people believe no one could leave their kids unsupervised until age 14. The law didn't actually say that; it said that by age 14, kids on their own would automatically NOT be considered neglected. But it was often misinterpreted. And stories like this one — where a suburban Chicago mom was investigated for letting her 8-year-old walk the dog — didn't help.

The new Illinois law allows "parents to take a commonsense approach to raising their children," says Nora Collins-Mandeville, Director of Systems Reform Policy at the Illinois ACLU.

The bill passed in part as a social justice measure. It recognizes that when, say, a single mom working two jobs has her kids come home with a latchkey, that's not neglect: that's poverty. "Before passage of



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this bill, many parents had these permissions weaponized against them,” said Virginia state Rep. Jennifer McClellan, a Democrat who supported the bill as a state senator just before moving on to the U.S. House of Representatives.

Happiest of all, perhaps, are the home-schoolers, whose kids are often out and about, even during “school hours.” “Home-school families know that some of the best learning happens by doing,” said Will Estrada, Senior Counsel at the Home School Legal Defense Association. “Parents should be free to let their kids grow without fear of an unnecessary child protective services investigation.”

Until now, it has been too easy to dial 911, report an unsupervised child and throw a decent family into chaos.

But this is a country founded on freedom. That includes the freedom of kids to play outside, run errands and just be kids. Happy Independence Day to them!

At least in seven states.

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