



Written by [Lenore Skenazy](#) on January 24, 2023

Letting Kids Play Outside Is Not Neglect

Each year, the nonprofit I helm, Let Grow, works with local advocacy groups, parents and sometimes even kids to get states to pass the “Reasonable Childhood Independence” law. This law says that “child neglect” is when you put your kid in serious, obvious and likely danger — not anytime you take your eyes off them.

Want your kids to play outside, walk to the store, come home with a latchkey? Parents don’t have to second-guess themselves in the four states where this bill has passed, always with bipartisan sponsorship. In fact, it sailed through red state Utah and blue state Colorado *unanimously*.



Lenore Skenazy

This is the testimony I always submit. Wish us luck!

“To the State Legislators:

This is regarding 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 nonprofit Let Grow. At Let Grow, we believe in safety: Helmets, seatbelts, car seats...

We just don’t believe kids need a security detail every time they leave the house.

And yet, despite crime plummeting about 50% since its peak in the ‘90s — and remaining far below those tough years even now — just 11% of kids walk to school these days. One study found that only 6% of kids ages 9-13 play outside on their own for an hour or more a week!

Instead, many kids are driven from activity to activity, and plenty more spend hours on the couch, staring at a screen. There are many reasons for this, but one is that some parents worry that even if *they* know their kids are capable of walking to the store, or 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. A caseworker interviewed all three of Kari’s kids, asking her daughter, age 8, ‘Do your parents ever show you movies with naked people in them?’

What?!? Kari was so upset. But the caseworker had to check off the boxes.

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.

That’s not to mention the parents whose strained finances leave them no choice but to trust their kids



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with independence as soon as they believe they're ready for it. This makes overly broad neglect laws a social justice issue: If helicopter parenting is the law of the land, what about those who literally cannot afford to do it?

But childhood freedom is not just a parenting issue. It's a health issue. As children's independence has been going down, childhood depression, anxiety and even suicide have been going up.

A Reasonable Childhood Independence Bill would reassure 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. Not when you trust them to start becoming part of the world.

America can't be the land of the free if its kids are cooped up inside. It can't be the home of the brave if kids aren't allowed to have a few adventures.

Let the authorities investigate true cases of neglect, not parents who give their kids the kind of childhood we grew up with — and are grateful for.

Sincerely,

Lenore Skenazy"

Lenore Skenazy is president of Let Grow, a contributing writer at Reason.com, and author of "Has the World Gone Skenazy?" To learn more about Lenore Skenazy (Lskenazy@yahoo.com) and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate webpage at www.creators.com.

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