



Written by [Lenore Skenazy](#) on March 10, 2023

NJ Dad Arrested After Letting His Child Walk Outside

Last fall, just as Keith Kaplan was finishing up his first term as a town councilman in the New York suburb of Teaneck, New Jersey, he proposed a Reasonable Childhood Independence bill. It states that when parents allow kids to perform age-old independent activities, like walking or playing outside, they are not guilty of “neglect” unless the kids are in obvious, serious and likely danger.

For Kaplan, the bill is especially important. That’s because of an incident he witnessed involving his friends, their daughter and the police.



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On December 31, 2020, Kaplan received a text from friends who lived a few blocks away. They wanted to know if kids were allowed to be outside alone with parental permission. The police, it seemed, were at their house. Kaplan headed over, too.

His friends had allowed their daughter, who was almost 7 years old, to take a walk around the neighborhood. A retired police officer had seen her and called the cops to report a child outside by herself in the cold.

The responding officer easily located the girl who was “dressed appropriately,” according to his report. He asked for her address, which she gave him. It was a few blocks away, and the cop proceeded to walk her home.

When they arrived, the girl introduced the officer to her mother and father, according to Kaplan. But the officer refused to release her unless her parents presented their identification. When they declined to do so — arguing they hadn’t done anything wrong — he called for backup.

When Kaplan arrived at his friends’ home, he started filming the encounter. By now, the girl had started crying. Then her father did “what any dad would — he went to hug his crying kid,” says Kaplan. “And at that point he was arrested. With handcuffs.”

The police report states that the father attempted to prevent the police from taking his daughter into protective custody. “I’m not going to let you do that,” he said, according to the report.

Three cops wrestled the father to the ground and then placed him in a police car, according to Kaplan. He was taken away and charged with obstructing justice, a disorderly persons offense.

Later, in his cell, he was interviewed by a woman from child protective services. She determined he was not a threat to anyone, and he was released and given a court date. The court found him guilty, and he was fined \$133.

Kaplan had already been a champion of childhood independence. While the family wished to remain anonymous, Kaplan drafted the bill in response to the incident. Kaplan’s Childhood Independence bill represents his efforts to stop treating every child as if they’re in constant danger, and every adult as if



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they're a potential predator.

It passed by a vote of 4 to 1 in December and went into effect at the beginning of this year. This makes Teaneck a place where kids can be kids, and parents can breathe a little easier.

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