



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on May 11, 2011

Appeal for “Kidnapped” Swedish Homeschooler Draws Supporters

As the now-infamous case of Swedish homeschooler Domenic Johansson (at left, with his parents) — seized by authorities because of homeschooling almost two years ago — continues to drag on through the judicial system, a group of the family’s supporters turned out at an appeal in Stockholm on May 11 to express their hope that the family would be reunited soon.



The story of the Johansson tragedy has [caused an international uproar](#), attracting the involvement of numerous prominent human-rights groups in Sweden and around the world. At least hundreds of thousands of homeschooling activists, particularly in America, have been outraged by the case. And now, some Swedes are taking an interest too.

First, some [background](#): After years of battling the social services over not sending Domenic to pre-school and not giving him the government’s “recommended” — though technically optional — vaccines, the family decided to move to India, the mother’s homeland. But right before their plane was set to take off, authorities abducted the boy. He’s been in state custody ever since.

The original reason for ripping the family apart was homeschooling, which is technically legal in Sweden until [a new law banning it goes into effect later this year](#). But social services later complained that Domenic had not received all his vaccines and that he had two baby-teeth cavities the family was planning to treat in India.

The battle to reunite the family has been going on ever since. And on May 11, a high-level appeals court was supposed to review the case. Protesters supporting the family arrived with signs — some of the activists were relatively cheerful, others were obviously on the verge of crying — in what a spokesperson for the court referred to as unusual.

Unfortunately, Christer and Annie Johansson, the boy’s parents, could not show up to the hearing. Annie has been hospitalized half a dozen times since her son was abducted by armed police from the jetliner bound for India. She had what her husband refers to as a sort of “breakdown” after the traumatic experience.

In a telephone interview with *The New American*, Christer explained what happened. The night before the appeal was scheduled to be heard, Annie started exhibiting the same symptoms which led to her past hospitalizations — extreme nervousness, difficulty breathing, severe exhaustion, and more. Christer was feeling very ill, too.

“We have been discriminated against for 10 years.... We don’t want to be abused so much one more



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time,” Christer admitted. “And I’m really, really worried about Annie’s health,” he added, noting that the government was obviously not interested.

So, thinking that any sort of breakdown might be used against them in court, the Johanssons notified authorities the morning of the hearing that they could not attend. A little after 10 a.m., however, the court convened anyway.

A handful of the family’s supporters shuffled in and took their seats at the back of the sterile room. A panel of female judges sat at the front. Two representatives for the social services were on one side of the room, and the Johanssons’ court-appointed attorney and a translator were on the other. Some formalities were taken care of, all of the judges and lawyers (including the Johanssons’) had a few chuckles, and the audience was asked to leave the room.

After most of the protesters had exited, a young man named Magnus Andersson stood up and began talking. He told the court that he knew the family before it was torn apart by local officials, and that Domenic was a happy, healthy child prior to that fateful day. Before long, he was once again ordered to leave the room.

Andersson insisted that he wanted to testify before the court as other family supporters began to look back in the room to see what the commotion was about. Finally, after a few minutes explaining to the court what a grave mistake had been made, several security guards arrived, surrounded him, and escorted him from the court room. The actual hearing occurred entirely behind closed doors.

Holding back tears, Andersson told *The New American* that he didn’t really want to talk about it. “They were all playing on the same team,” he reluctantly said of the process going on inside, burying his face in the palms of his hands.

Other supporters of the family came away with a similar impression. And so did Christer, who said he has not been allowed to select his own attorney, has been prohibited from calling the witnesses of his choice, and has not even been allowed to cross examine the social-service representatives.

And the family’s court-appointed lawyer did not exactly inspire confidence, according to supporters who showed up. When asked by *The New American* whether the parents should have their child returned, he said: “Since I represent them, and I think they have — I think they should have their kid back, yes.”

Ardent supporters of the family, many of whom had to take off from work, came out for a variety of reasons. Berno Viden, a missionary and homeschooling activist, was there to stand up for the Johanssons and to try to [protect educational freedom](#). “I came here because I’m interested [in] defend[ing] homeschooling in Sweden,” he told *The New American* in an interview after the hearing, noting how sad the case was.

Another supporter, Johanna Ojrell, had different concerns. “I think they haven’t done anything wrong,” she said about the Johansson family. “They have done the same things that I have with my kid — for example, having an individual vaccination program is not illegal. And I mean, everyone can get cavities sometimes. I don’t understand how that can even be an issue [in whether] the parents are going to have their kid or not.”

Ojrell is also working on putting together a documentary about the Johansson ordeal. She told *The New American* that she wants to bring attention to the case and show that she cares.

One of the supporters who remained outside the building throughout the hearing — where [multiple signs](#) featured pictures of the family with the words “reunite” over the top, and a giant placard read



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“Return Domenic” — called the whole situation “disgusting.” Stefan Sandell, a social worker who traveled from a nearby city to support the family, also told *The New American*: “It made me want to scream that this happened in Sweden.... It’s too much.... They should release him immediately.”

The social services representatives — a woman with a crew cut and a man dressed in a suit and tie — both refused to comment after the hearing as they rushed out the door. *The New American* has contacted the municipal social-services offices on numerous occasions. It has always declined to offer a statement, citing “secrecy.”

Because the family could not attend the appeal, a document will be prepared and sent to the Johanssons for them to respond to. In Sweden, the law states that the ultimate goal of the social services taking children into custody is to eventually reunite the family. What steps, if any, are being taken to accomplish that mission remain unclear so far.

Every six months until Domenic becomes an adult, the parents may request a review and beg for their child back. At the moment, the U.S.-based Home School Legal Defense Association and the Alliance Defense Fund are appealing the case to a European-level court in an effort to reunite the family based on violations of human rights and international treaties to which Sweden is a party. That case is progressing slowly, and no arguments have been heard yet. But the [pressure is mounting](#) as more and more organizations get involved.



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