

July 15, 2008

STATEMENT to the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security from Rep. Sue Myrick in support of HR 423, Kristen's Act Reauthorization of 2007:

I would like to thank Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Smith for the opportunity to speak today.

I am here because 11 years ago, Kristen Modafferi disappeared shortly after her 18th birthday. I asked the family how I could help.

After visiting with them and hearing a detailed account of their nightmare, I introduced Kristen's Act in 1999. It was swiftly ratified in both the House and Senate before being signed into law by President Clinton in 2000.

Kristen's Law established funding to maintain a national clearinghouse for missing adults whose disappearance is determined by law enforcement to be foul play. As with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, this bill provided assistance to law enforcement and families in missing persons cases of those over the age of 17.

In addition, it authorized 1 million dollars a year for fiscal years 2001 through 2004 to organizations like the National Center for Missing Adults—a non-profit dedicated to helping families locate missing loved ones 18 and older.

Kristen's Law expired in 2005. I introduced a reauthorization in the 109th Congress, unfortunately my attempts to get it passed were unsuccessful. I am here today in hopes that in this Congress, we may honor the efforts of so many and pay tribute to mournful families by moving this bill.

Kristen Modafferi disappeared in 1997.

She was an extremely bright, hard-working young lady and attended North Carolina State University. She had just finished her freshman year; and like so many other college students, she decided she wanted to go to another city to spend the summer and work and have a new experience.

So she moved to San Francisco. She enrolled in photography class at Berkeley and got a job at a local coffee shop. She began settling in and making friends.

On Monday, June 23—which was just a mere 3 weeks after her 18th birthday—she left her job at the coffee shop and headed to the beach for the afternoon. She has not been seen since.

When her panicked parents called National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, they heard these unbelievable words, “I’m sorry—we cannot help you.”

They were shocked to discover that because Kristen was 18, the Center could not place her picture and story into its national database, or offer any assistance whatsoever. In fact, there is no national agency in the United States to help locate missing adults.

Unfortunately, the Modaferris are not alone. The families of thousands of missing adults—50,930 cases as of last year—have found that law enforcement and other agencies respond very differently when the person who has disappeared is not a child.

Coping with the disappearance of a family member is a traumatic experience—and I know personally what the Modaferris went through. But to be forced to conduct the search on their own without any skills or resources is simply unjust.

The Reauthorization of Kristen’s Act would again establish funding to maintain a national clearinghouse for missing adults and

provide assistance to law enforcement and families in missing persons cases.

The bill would authorize 4 million dollars a year for fiscal years 2009 through 2019 to the National Center for Missing Adults. Since the inception of Kristen's Act so many years ago, I have been thoroughly impressed with the dedicated and motivated staff of the Center.

Kristen's Act does send a message to these families that they deserve help in locating endangered and involuntarily missing loved ones.

Endangered missing adults, regardless of their age, should receive not only the benefit of a search effort by local law enforcement—but also the help of an experienced national organization.

By moving this bill, families will never again have to hear they cannot be assisted because a loved one is too old.