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TRUE or FALSE. Kidnapping committed by a family member is considered child endangerment.

- a. True
- b. False

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New Poll Reveals that 81 Percent of Americans Underestimate Threat of Family Abduction

Federal Legislation Unveiled to Combat America's Hidden Crime

(Washington, DC) - The **Polly Klaas Foundation** joined Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-California), Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas), Representative Lynn Woolsey (D-California), Representative Steve Chabot (R-Ohio) and other members of Congress today at a press conference on Capitol Hill to announce new federal legislation to combat family abductions. Of the approximate 262,000 children abducted each year in America, 78 percent are kidnapped by their own family members.

Such statistics contradict the public perception of the issue, according to a national poll conducted by Harris Interactive, Inc. announced today as part of a new report from the Polly Klaas Foundation. The poll of 1,021 Americans showed that:

- 81 percent of Americans underestimate the threat of family abduction; but
- Once informed of the problem, 83 percent of respondents support expanded law enforcement training and 81 percent support public education to prevent family abductions.

"Most parents' worst nightmare is that their child will be snatched by a stranger, but the odds are much higher that the kidnapper will be a relative," said Jenni Thompson, director of public affairs for the Polly Klaas Foundation. "Every three minutes, another child is abducted by a family member, yet too few Americans realize the prevalence of these crimes and the extent of the damage done to children."

For announcement of the **Family Abduction Prevention Act of 2004**, Thompson joined the bill's Senate sponsors Feinstein and Hutchison and House sponsors Woolsey, Chabot, Nick Lampson (D-Texas) and Martin Frost (D-Texas) as well as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and members of Take Root (an advocacy group of adults who, as children, were abducted by family members).

The bill, which was introduced in the House of Representatives today, would allocate federal funding to support training for local law enforcement agencies, 70 percent of which have no protocol in place to deal with family abduction cases. Funding would also help cover investigation and extradition costs and pay for a national public awareness campaign.

"We must take family abduction as seriously as we take any kind of child abduction. To the child who is uprooted, isolated, deceived and hidden, it doesn't matter who took them or why. It's about terror, grief and living in hiding," said Liss Hart-Haviv, Executive Director of Take Root. "I know. I was abducted by my own mother and work every day with other adults whose parents abducted them as children. The damage can be lifelong."

At the press conference, the Foundation also released a new report, entitled "**America's Hidden Crime: When the Kidnapper is Kin**," that takes a comprehensive look at this serious but rarely understood issue and combines statistics with recommendations for prevention. The full report can be viewed here. Highlights include:

- The number of family abductions will likely increase without a significant commitment to combat this crime. This is because the number of people in the 'high-risk' group for perpetrating family abductions, families going through bitter custody disputes and divorce proceedings, is on the rise.
- Children abducted by family members suffer significant and lasting trauma. Snatched from a familiar setting and away from loved ones, the child is forced into life underground, taught to avoid and distrust authority figures and often denied health visits and schooling.
- Even following reunification, abducted children can experience difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships, trusting others, trusting their own judgment, and establishing a sense of self. Somatic disturbances such as bed wetting, thumb sucking and nightmares are common.
- With nearly 70 percent of police lacking any type of written protocol for family abductions, policymakers can help law enforcement agencies allocate resources for sufficient staff and enhanced computer technology to make the crime of family abduction a case priority.

"For every case of abduction by a stranger, there are over 1,700 cases like mine," said Michael S. Smith, a Walnut Creek, California father whose children, Zachary, now 15, and Chelsea, now 12, were abducted six years ago by his ex-wife during a difficult custody battle. "Parental abduction throws fear and anxiety into the daily lives of everyone concerned. It rips families apart at the seams, which is why I'm urging Congress to do all that it can to make this crime a top priority."

About the Polly Klaas Foundation

Founded in 1993 following the abduction and murder of 12-year-old Polly Klaas, the Polly Klaas Foundation is a national nonprofit that helps find missing children and prevents them from going missing in the first place. We promote public policies, educate the public, and provide families, law enforcement and communities with ongoing support and expertise to protect children. The foundation is headquartered in Petaluma, California. For more information, contact www.pollyklaas.org or (800) 587-4357.

Marc Klaas is not associated with the Polly Klaas Foundation. You can contact his organization, KlaasKids Foundation For Children, at (415) 331-6867.