

Proponent testimony – Senate Judiciary Committee (2/04/26)
Tara Rieck – Mother
Subject – Senate Bill 374

IN PERSON

Good Morning,

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman, and Committee members. My name is Tara Rieck, and I am here today to support Senate Bill 374.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today. For those of you who do not know my family's story, here is a summary. I am the mother of Logan and Austin Jackson, murdered by their father—someone sworn to love them and protect them.

On October 24, 2020, my world became irreparably shattered. That day, I had anticipated cheering at my daughter's soccer game; instead, accompanied by a family member, I returned to the home my children grew up in as it was their father's weekend, to investigate why my children and their father were absent.

There, we discovered my 12-year-old son, Austin, lifeless on the floor from a gunshot wound. In disbelief, I first mistook it for a cruel Halloween prank, but the reality soon pierced through. As authorities were called I desperately sought safety for my 9-month-old daughter, uncertain of the perpetrator's whereabouts and unable to protect her there.

Returning later, I learned that officials had found my 14-year-old son, Logan, also slain. Their father had also abducted my two young daughters, telling them they would never see their mother again. By day's end, my girls were safely rescued, and the father was apprehended in Oklahoma. Throughout, I remained in shock—a numbness taking over the overwhelming chaos, as I have learned, the mind puts up walls to protect itself from such devastation.

I try not to think about that day; it remains unbearable. The nitty-gritty details of that day are not a place I want my mind to visit. Yet the burial nine days later always picks at my heart: Walking away from their caskets felt like I was abandoning my boys. I wanted to stay with them, and going back to the car felt like betrayal, like I was doing something wrong.

I didn't leave because I was ready—far from it—but because I had to keep moving, life demanded it. They had already left this earth. I will forever carry the burden: discovering Austin lifeless, learning of Logan's tragic end, the horror inflicted upon my daughters as they were told they would never see their mother again, and walking away from my boys on their burial day.

My sons, Logan and Austin, would be 19 and 17 now—one graduated from high school, the other about to. But in my heart, they stay forever 14 and 12. I can't picture who they'd be today; does that make us strangers? What would they be doing? They loved competitive

soccer—would they have played in high school? My family and I have built a new normal, but it sometimes feels like betrayal as well. I miss my boys deeply and want them back, though I know it's impossible.

Nearly 5.5 years have passed since my sons' tragic deaths, yet here we stand, battling for basic safety amid a glaring legal loophole. We deserve the secure detention of Donald Ray Jackson Jr., the murderer, but for some reason, this type of closure still eludes us.

I urge this committee and the entire legislature to swiftly pass Senate Bill 374—which I rename the Logan and Austin Bill—passage would shield my daughters from having to live in fear. We've endured that nightmare once; never again. Without closing this loophole, our lives remain in peril. Passage is imperative not just for us, but for all survivors in similar torment.

As I understand it - Kansas Senate Bill 374 requires the further evaluation and treatment in competency proceedings for defendants charged with the most serious offenses, aiming to close loopholes in detaining dangerous individuals. That seems like common-sense legislation.

I see this bill simply as sealing a hole to ensure those committing unimaginable atrocities, trapped in legal limbo, stay securely confined. Our courts need clear guidance; they lack a path. To have to wait this long is NOT OK. I urge this committee to quickly pass this favorably.

Madam Chair, thank you to the Senate Judiciary Committee for quickly hearing this bill. Thank you to our Attorney General's team and our Leavenworth County Attorney for their efforts and guidance in crafting this legislation, and thank you to my State Senator for working with me on this issue and making it a priority.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tara Rieck

Leavenworth, Kansas