

Oklahoma State Senate

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Senator Nichols Targets Child Predators with Death Penalty, Child Abuse Response Team

The Oklahoma Legislature has taken strong action to combat child abuse in Oklahoma, passing a bill that would subject child predators to the death penalty and establish the Child Abuse Response Team (CART) within the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation.

Sen. Jonathon Nichols, author of Senate Bill 1800, said the measure would create a statewide team of expert child abuse investigators who will assist local law enforcement entities in handling difficult child abuse cases.

Nichols also included Senator Jay Paul Gumm's amendment that subjects repeat child molesters to the death penalty. Nichols stated that the death penalty will put Oklahoma at the forefront of strengthening laws against child predators.

"This death penalty provision sends a clear message to child predators in our state," said Nichols, R-Norman. "We will find you, we will prosecute you, and then, we will put you to death."

"The crime of child abuse is horrible, and it is our responsibility as lawmakers to ensure the safety of our most vulnerable and precious citizens," Nichols said. "The Child Abuse Response Team will strengthen local efforts to protect children by giving local law enforcement access to some of the most experienced child abuse investigators in the state."

CART will include criminal investigators as well as forensic interviewers who are both highly trained and experienced in the area of child abuse investigations. Operating as an on-call response team, CART will be available at the request of local law enforcement agencies, just as other emergency response units are available to law enforcement statewide.

Nichols believes the Child Abuse Response Team will compliment the Kelsey Briggs Act which grants judges and the Department of Human Services the authority to call in the OSBI to assist in local child abuse cases.

"Now, when a judge, local police department or DHS calls the OSBI for help in these difficult cases, OSBI can send out members of the Child Abuse Response Team," Nichols said. "And this team will be made up of the very best professionals in this critical area of child abuse investigations."

“While it is heartbreaking that recent incidents have revealed the need for reform in our system, I’m pleased that the legislature has passed this measure to let our law enforcement agencies and judicial system better protect our children,” said Nichols. “The CART members will bring our system much-needed expertise that will ensure cases don’t fall through cracks in the bureaucracy.”

Nichols said current law mandates that child predators be sentenced to life without parole. Mandating life imprisonment without the possibility of parole was made possible by Nichols when his Senate Bill 1425 was signed into law four years ago.

The addition of the death penalty amendment provides a strong deterrent to the crime of child molestation, while protecting the public from child predators, Nichols added.

“This bill gives us two strong weapons to combat child abuse in Oklahoma,” said Nichols. “And our legislature should continue to find solutions to make our state a safer place for our children.”

While opposition argued that the Supreme Court has already ruled the death penalty is unconstitutional when applied to cases of rape, Nichols believes that the Supreme Court decision cited by opponents ruled on the issue of adult rape and not rape of a child.

“I believe that our highest Court will agree that this crime of raping a child is so heinous and horrific that the death penalty is a right and just punishment,” said Nichols.

The measure will now advance to the Governor’s office.

For more information, contact:

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