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Senators Call for Return of Houston Boy, Allegedly Kidnapped by Mother

By: Gabrielle Banks

A bipartisan coalition of U.S. senators is calling for the immediate return of an 8-year-old Houston boy who has been in Brazil with his mother since 2013, according to a letter they sent to the heads of the Justice and State departments in Washington, D.C.

The request for additional action by the both the Justice Department and the State Department comes in the midst of a federal trial in Houston, where the maternal grandparents have been charged with aiding in a conspiracy to help their daughter kidnap the boy.

His father, a doctor at the Medical Center, has testified that son did not return from a trip with his ex-wife to attend a wedding in Brazil.

The strongly worded appeal from Senators Chuck Grassley, Dianne Feinstein, John Cornyn and Ted Cruz, of the Senate Judiciary Committee, was released Tuesday after it was sent to Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

The letter calling for the return of Nico Brann to be “a top priority,” highlights a long standing rift between the U.S. and Brazil in resolving international custody disputes.

The letter notes that the while the executive branch of the government, including the attorney general of Brazil, agrees that the boy should be returned, the Brazilian judiciary has not abided by the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction in returning children like Nico.

The letter asked top U.S. officials to aid in securing the return of the boy follows testimony before the Senate judiciary committee about the case on April 24 from the boy’s father, Dr. Christopher Brann, an internal medicine specialist at Baylor College of Medicine. Brann has publicly campaigned for his son’s release, including in an op-ed for The Washington Post.

“Given the seriousness of Dr. Brann’s case, we request that you review the facts of the case as we understand them and explore whether there are other federal laws that will help secure the return of Nico Brann,” the senators wrote. “Any American citizen child who is abducted and remains abroad is one too many.”

Brann was grilled by defense lawyers about the particulars of the case last week in a Houston federal courtroom, where his former in-laws Carlos and Jemima Guimaraes, are on trial for conspiracy to abduct the boy. Prosecutors say the couple helped their daughter, codefendant Marcelle Guimaraes, book a return trip when she left for a wedding in July 2013 but also secure a job abroad and enroll the boy in a Brazilian school as part of an elaborate premeditated plan to relocate permanently, in violation of a custody arrangement in a Harris County courtroom. The boy’s mother is also indicted in the case, but remains in Brazil.

The grandparents were arrested in Miami as they traveled to Houston for a vacation, and were unaware they had been charged in an indictment that was sealed by the court.

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