



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on November 13, 2024

Georgia Mom Arrested After 11-Year-Old Son Walks to Small Town Alone

A mom in rural Georgia was arrested and threatened with prosecution because her nearly 11-year-old son walked a short distance into town by himself.

Unscheduled Trip

On the evening of October 30, Brittany Patterson was “handcuffed” and “hailed off to jail” after a passing driver called police upon spotting Patterson’s son Soren, then just a week and a half shy of 11 years old, strolling along a road, [reported Reason’s Lenore Skenazy](#).

Around noon that day, Patterson had taken her oldest son to a doctor’s appointment. Soren, who was supposed to go along, was nowhere to be found. But Patterson, who lives on 16 acres with her kids and her father (“her husband works out of state,” noted Skenazy) and whose mother and sister live nearby, wasn’t concerned.

“I figured he was in the woods or at Grandma’s house,” she told Skenazy.

In reality, Soren was ambling down the road toward Mineral Bluff, a tiny town near Georgia’s northern border that is home to 370 people. The town, which is less than a mile from Patterson’s home, boasts a post office, a Dollar General, a gas station, a Baptist church — and not much else.

Down the same road, whose speed limit is variously 25 miles per hour or 35 miles per hour, came a car driven by a woman who saw Soren and asked if he was OK. Although he said he was fine, the woman called the police.

A Fannin County sheriff picked up Soren and called his mother. “She asked me if I knew he was downtown, and I said no,” Patterson recalled.

While she was perturbed that her son had taken off for town without telling her, she said, “I was not panicking as I know the roads and know he is mature enough to walk there without incident.”

County Cracks Down

The sheriff, on the other hand, expressed grave concern over a child who isn’t even hers.

“She kept mentioning how he could have been run over, or kidnapped or ‘anything’ could have happened,” said Patterson.

Patterson, however, felt the matter was no cause for alarm. “She had grown up in the area with plenty of unsupervised time to wander and play,” wrote Skenazy, “and was raising her kids that way, too.”



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"The mentality here," explained Patterson, "is more free-range."

Unfortunately, the sheriff and some other county officials do not share that mentality.

The sheriff took Soren home in the afternoon but returned about 6:30 p.m. with another officer. In front of her children, they proceeded to cuff Patterson's hands behind her back, then took her to the station, where she was jailed. According to a [GoFundMe page](#) to raise money for Patterson's legal defense, she said that the incident "was humiliating ... and that her children are so sad watching her get arrested (and her son feels responsible)."

Patterson was released on \$500 bail, but the next day, a Fannin County Division of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) case manager visited her at home and her eldest son at school. According to Skenazy, "The case manager told Patterson that everything seemed fine."

But, she continued:

A few days later, DFCS presented Patterson with a "safety plan" for her to sign. It would require her to delegate a "safety person" to be a "knowing participant and guardian" and watch over the children whenever she leaves home. The plan would also require Patterson to download an app onto her son's phone allowing for his location to be monitored. (The day when it will be illegal *not* to track one's kids is rapidly approaching.) [Emphasis in original.]

Mom Lawyers Up

Patterson is obviously well-informed when it comes to the tyrannical treatment meted out to parents who don't monitor their children's every move. She remembered the case of [Melissa Henderson](#), a Texas woman who was charged with criminal reckless conduct for letting her 14-year-old daughter babysit her siblings, whereupon the girl's four-year-old brother went to his friend's house across the street without her knowledge. Instead of calling Henderson or her daughter to let them know, the friend's mom called the cops.

Henderson sought help from ParentsUSA, an organization that provides legal assistance to parents who have been falsely charged with child neglect. Patterson did the same, securing the group's founder, attorney David DeLugas, as her counsel.

DeLugas, who contends that the law under which Patterson was charged was declared unconstitutional by the Georgia Supreme Court in 1997, contacted the assistant district attorney (ADA) to discuss the case. "The ADA," penned Skenazy, "told DeLugas that if Patterson would sign the safety plan, the criminal charges would be dropped."

DeLugas countered that doing so would take away all vestiges of Soren's independence, but the ADA was adamant that the boy had been in danger and the safety plan was necessary.

Wrote Skenazy:

With safety plans, the veiled threat is that if you don't sign, your children could be taken away, says DeLugas. In this case, he says, the unspoken deal seems to be: Sign it and the state won't prosecute. If the state *does* prosecute, Patterson could face a reckless conduct charge, a \$1,000 fine, and a year in jail. [Emphasis in original.]

Patterson, though, remains resolute. "I will not sign," she told Skenazy.



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Despite all this, let it not be said that DFCS bureaucrats are completely heartless. Patterson's case manager, after all, did send Soren a birthday card.



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