



HAVING KIDS™

Planning a fair start

HavingKids.org

info@havingkids.org

Governor Bill Haslam
1st Floor, State Capital
600 Charlotte Ave.
Nashville, TN 37243
Bill.Haslam@tn.gov

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Dear Governor Haslam,

[Having Kids](#) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to [reforming family planning](#) by replacing parent-centered family planning models with the human rights-based and child-first [Fair Start model](#). We write out of concern for current and future child abuse/neglect victims in Tennessee.

Last month, the Murfreesboro Police Department entered the home of Sharon Helene Robinson and Bradley Dwight Hill and encountered a horror scene. Inside Robinson's and Hill's home, the officers found a severely autistic young boy, naked and covered in human and dog feces. Police stated that the boy was even eating some of the feces. Robinson admitted that the house did not have running water and that her child had not been to school in over a month. Robinson and Hill were arrested and charged with child abuse/neglect and reckless endangerment. Robinson was also charged with aggravated child abuse after she admitted that this abuse of her helpless child was the result of long-term neglect.

As both Robinson and Hill are currently being held on bond and waiting further court proceedings, it is, of course, extremely important that this boy receive the care and attention he deserves. It is critical, though, that he not be put back in the hands of his abusers in the near future. Having Kids wants more for the children of Tennessee than the state's after-the-fact reaction to such horrible abuse, however, and we're convinced you feel the same way. After all, reacting after a child has been made to suffer means that the child will spend his or her lifetime recovering from this trauma. From a purely economic point of view, the state will spend considerably more to attempt to reverse these negative effects.

What happened to this child in Robinson's and Hill's case stems from a larger problem of poor family planning and parenting; a problem that begins with a paradigm in which the decision to have a child is focused on what parents want in the short term rather than what each child needs in the long term. In 2015 alone, there were nearly 75,000 reports of child abuse and neglect referred to for investigation in Tennessee, an increase of 23% from 2011.[1] Clearly, this is a systemic problem that is growing in severity. The current model – which makes having and raising kids the exclusive business of the parents – ignores every child's right to a minimum standard of wellbeing not only at birth, but throughout childhood. The parent-centered family planning and parenting paradigm is a violation of the rights of children to be protected.

Having Kids urges the State of Tennessee, through its appropriate agents, to consider eventually seeking an order in the event of a conviction and probation, to prevent Robinson and Hill from having additional children for a limited time period as part of their necessary rehabilitation. The details of such an approach can be found at havingkids.org/solution-fair-start-orders. Robinson's and Hill's conduct has demonstrated a clear unfitness to parent at this time, and the state should not be setting the couple up for further failure. The state would not consider putting the helpless boy back into the couple's care; the state should similarly consider the right of a child not to be born to either of these individuals at this point in time.

We urge you and your administration to protect future children in Tennessee by working with legislators on a law that explicitly authorizes courts, in specialized cases of egregious abuse such as that of Robinson and Hill, to issue orders preventing abusive and neglectful parents from having additional children for limited time periods. The State of Tennessee can fulfill its obligations to future children by moving towards a human-rights based and child-first family planning model as well. Having Kids is available to assist in creating state policy and law that furthers this goal. Please contact us.

Sincerely,



Anne Green, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Having Kids

cc: Bonnie Hommrich
Commissioner
Department of Children's Services
315 Deaderick, 10th Floor
Nashville, TN 37243
Bonnie.Hommrich@tn.gov
DCS.Custsrv@tn.gov

cc: Jennings H. Jones
Rutherford County District Attorney
320 West Main Street, Suite 100
Murfreesboro, TN 37130

[1] Per statistics compiled by the Children's Welfare League of America.
<https://www.cwla.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/TENNESSEE.pdf>