

Testimony of Senator Amy Klobuchar
“The Abduction of Ukrainian Children by the Russian Federation”
Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs
December 3, 2025

Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Schatz, members of the subcommittee, thank you for calling today’s hearing and for the invitation to participate.

Mr. Chairman, I have appreciated the chance to partner with you on legislation to raise the pressure on Russia to return Ukraine’s children. I believe strong bipartisanship in the Senate will reinforce America’s commitment to those kids and their families.

I recently returned from Rome, where twelve days ago I had the honor of joining a Ukrainian delegation sent by President Zelenskyy to meet Pope Leo at the Vatican. I was there alongside Maksym, who will testify here today.

It’s one thing to hear, as we all have now, about the thousands of Ukrainian children who have been kidnapped and the families struggling to find them. It’s another thing entirely to actually sit across the table from some of these children, as I did in Rome, and to hear them tell their stories.

I met Sashko, who was taken from his home city of Mariupol after being wounded in a Russian bombardment. At our breakfast he was with his brave grandmother Liudmyla, who told me she eventually took matters into her own hands and went on a dangerous journey into occupied territory to rescue him.

With the Pope, I stood next to Veronika, who was confined in Russia against her will for her 13th and 14th birthdays – including periods of time in isolation – before she managed to escape.

These are tragic stories of childhoods interrupted by brutality. But they are also stories of resilience – even hope. Veronika is attending school again in Kyiv, now in the 11th grade. It was good to see the big smile on her face and the tears of joy after the Pope led us in prayer and handed her a rosary.

More than 1,800 children have returned, according to Ukraine’s figures. We were at the Vatican to urge Pope Leo to use his standing and moral authority to help return more children through mediation.

I believe the Pope can play a critical role, but let’s be clear: any mediator’s task would become far more difficult if we lose track of who is missing and where they are.

The kids are being moved through networks of camps all across Russia. We know of more than 200 sites, thanks to the incredible detective work of Yale researchers led by Nathaniel Raymond, who will also testify today. His team has tracked these movements with satellite imagery, and has turned bits and pieces of data into profiles of individual children.

My bipartisan legislation with Senator Grassley, which has now passed the Senate as part of the defense bill, authorizes our federal agencies to continue supporting these tracking efforts. The State Department has had a leading role, and I urge this subcommittee to prioritize this funding.

The United States is not alone in assisting Ukraine with the tracking and recovery of its children. Our allies are stepping up too. In September, President Zelenskyy announced a new initiative among several countries to share data and build up the capacity of Ukraine's own law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

We can do our part in this international coalition. The Senate can come together in this cause. The United States can stand with these kids.

Chairman Graham, I look forward to continuing to work together on this. Thank you again for bringing us together today.