

## CARU'S ROLE

The Ventura County District Attorney's Child Abduction and Recovery Unit (CARU) is mandated by the state to enforce child custody and visitation orders and to locate and return children who have been taken or detained, in violation of another person's custody right. CARU is not a party to any custody action and all enforcement work is done on behalf of the Family Law, Probate and Dependency Courts. It is CARU's goal to help ensure peaceful enforcement of court orders for the benefit of the children involved.

CARU does not work on stranger abductions or cases in which the minor child is a runaway. In those situations, contact the appropriate law enforcement agency and/or call 911.

CARU handles three types of cases: Abductions, Visitations, and Good Cause.

"Abduction" cases generally involve situations in which the child has been removed from the jurisdiction or the child's location is unknown. Abductions may be within California, interstate, or international.

"Visitation" cases are those in which a court ordered right to visitation is being withheld.

"Good Cause" cases stem from concern for the safety of the minor child and require that the parties go back to court to address issues of extreme emotional or physical harm to the child.

CARU represents the People of the State of California and/or works on behalf of the Court. At no time will CARU represent you as an individual. Therefore, there is no attorney-client privilege. Contact information you provide to CARU is confidential and not subject to disclosure unless ordered by the Court.

## COURT ORDERS

Generally, court orders are needed for CARU to act. In an emergency parental abduction situation, CARU can begin an investigation to locate the child, but before CARU can physically retrieve a child, the Court's involvement is required. Therefore, when an abduction occurs, it is essential that a court custody order be obtained immediately.

Court orders must be for a specific time and place to be enforceable. Orders that say "reasonable," "by agreement," etc. are difficult to enforce. Outdated orders, made prior to some relevant recent event, might also require updating before CARU enforcement can occur. If you are being denied your court-ordered custody or visitation rights, it will be your responsibility to do the following:

- 1) If your child's whereabouts are unknown, make both a crime report with the appropriate police agency as well as a missing person's report. Provide the CARU with both report numbers.

- 2) Provide a complete copy of the most current court order to the police agency and to CARU.
- 3) Complete a CARU complaint form and provide all requested documents.
- 4) If you have an attorney, provide CARU with his or her name, and phone number.

You will be expected to make every good faith effort to help yourself, within the confines of the law. If any party is not satisfied with the present court custody order, he/she may take the matter back to court for a modification of the order.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

In most cases, CARU will attempt to resolve custody and visitation issues without litigation. This is done in a variety of ways, including but not limited to, phone calls, letters, and personal contacts. Since each case is unique, CARU's approach will differ according to the demands of the case. The CARU policy is to contact the offending parent by phone. Further investigation or personal contact requires court "appointment." This ensures that CARU's actions are consistent with the Court's intent. It is rare for CARU to criminally prosecute the offending party, but prosecution can occur when all other means of enforcement have failed and/or the interests of justice support such action.

## INTERSTATE OR INTERNATIONAL ABDUCTIONS

There are uniform state laws and an international treaty that should be utilized when children are wrongfully removed from their home-state or country of habitual residence. When an interstate or international abduction occurs, CARU can guide you through the process. Custody orders issued by another state must be registered and confirmed in the state where the child is located before enforcement action can occur per the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act (UCCJEA). The Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction is an international treaty to which many countries, including the USA, belong. The United States State Department strongly encourages the use of this treaty whenever possible.

## FAMILY LAW FACILITATOR

The Court Family Law Facilitator is available to help parents/parties who are not represented by an attorney. The Family Law Facilitator will not act as your lawyer but, may provide assistance concerning family law matters. They can be reached at 805-289-8732.

## OTHER RESOURCES

Child & Family Services Hotline	805-654-3200
Court Guardianship Self-Help Center	805-289-8812
Court Family Law Facilitator	805-289-8732
Ventura County Family Justice Center	805-652-7655
USA State Dept.	<a href="https://travel.state.gov">https://travel.state.gov</a>

## National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

1-800-843-5678  
1-800-THE-LOST



## Ventura County District Attorney Child Abduction and Recovery Unit

5720 Ralston Street, Suite 300  
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(805) 662-1750  
Hours: Monday – Friday  
8:00 am- 5:00 pm

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