

Parent tells of police visit when son not at school

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Wilson: Felt rights violated.

Ronnie Wilson knows what it's like to be awakened by a police officer knocking at his door.

The local contractor also learned what can happen when parents don't notify officials if their child doesn't show up at school.

During a cold snap in early January, Wilson said he and his wife tried to drive their fifth-grade son to school one morning.

But the battery in their truck was dead.

"It was so cold, I wasn't going to make him ride his bike or walk to school," Wilson said. "I told him he could stay home."

Wilson and his wife Sandy Foster buy disposable phones when they need to make calls but had no more time left on the last cell phone they bought.

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As a result, school officials couldn't reach them to see why their child wasn't in school and the couple couldn't notify school officials that their son wouldn't be there that morning.

They went back to bed.

About 8:30 or 9 a.m., Wilson said there was a knock on the door. When he looked through a peephole in the door, he saw an officer.

"I went to pull on my pants and the knob started turning," he said. "I was getting ready to answer the door and he tried to push it open an inch. I was sort of stunned."

Because a younger son tries to escape through the front door, Wilson said he's installed a mechanism that stops the front door from opening completely.

Wilson said the officer then walked by the side of the house and climbed over a fence into the backyard. The officer tried to push open a back door when Wilson said he yelled "What do you want?"

He said the officer said he was at the Wilson home because their son didn't go to school and no one called to say he'd be absent.

Wilson said he didn't understand why the officer didn't identify himself before trying to get into the home.

"There was no noise, no cries for help or 911 calls," he said. "How did he know we were even home?"

Wilson said the officer left.

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After thinking about it, Wilson said he felt his privacy rights were violated.

“I felt he could have walked into my home without my consent or knowledge if we weren’t home,” he said. “That really upset me because I felt that the sanctity of my home as a U.S. citizen had been violated.”

However local police officer Joe Humphrey said although law enforcement can open doors during welfare checks, they cannot legally enter a residence without a search warrant unless it’s an emergency situation.

After visiting with county and local law enforcement officers about the incident, Wilson said he was frustrated.

He then posted “No trespassing signs” on a back yard fence and signs about how his constitutional rights were violated in the front of his house.

“That’s when my sign campaign began because I felt that no one was listening,” Wilson said.

About two weeks ago, he took down the large signs in front of his home and later painted over the “No trespassing” words on the back yard fence.

“I finally feel like someone has finally listened to me,” Wilson said.

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