

Tim Hunt
Testimony
Congressional-Executive Commission on China
Hearing
“Bringing Home Americans Detained in China”
September 18, 2024

My sister Dawn Michelle Hunt is incarcerated in Guangdong Women’s Prison. She was arrested in 2014 and charged with smuggling, a charge she vehemently denies. Dawn was born on 12 June 1971, so she is now 53. She was a receptionist at the time she was arrested. As I write this, I think of the numerous times I’ve written to officials, lawyers and anyone else who would listen. I think I’ve written this type of letter hundreds of times since her incarceration, but over the years, things have changed. My sister and my family are getting worn down. Dawn’s health has been failing, and our father’s health is failing as well.

It all started when my sister was tricked into believing she had won a contest. She received an email stating that she had won a cash prize. When she contacted the contest organizers, she didn’t believe it at first, so she checked them out online and was surprised that the info they gave her checked out. With that, she sent them her passport information and they sent a ticket for her to travel to Hong Kong. She was there for nine days and she told me that the organizers treated her well. She went sightseeing, shopping and started to trust the organizers who put together her trip. After exploring Hong Kong, she was asked if she wanted to visit mainland China. After her positive experience in Hong Kong, she agreed. She acquired a visa for mainland China while she was in Hong Kong with the help of the organizers who put together her initial trip. She then flew to Mainland China and traveled around, sightseeing and shopping for nine days. She was then asked if she wanted to visit Australia as part of her prize. Once again, she agreed.

Before leaving for her Australian trip, she was told she also won some designer purses. Excited about her upcoming trip, and trusting the organizers, she took the purses before her flight, not knowing drugs were sewn inside the linings. She explained to me that the organizers wanted her to pack the purses in her luggage. She told them that her luggage was full so she and some people who organized her trips went to the Baiyun Leather market and the organizers purchased an additional bag for her.

She told me that while she was in the airport in China, on her way to Australia, she was called by airport security. They escorted her to a room and the luggage she checked (she checked two pieces) was in the room as well. She was asked if the luggage belonged to her, to which she responded “yes”. She stated that she was asked multiple times and each time she said “yes” not knowing drugs were in the lining of the purses she won from the organizers of the contest. She told me that she even paid a small excess weight fee since the luggage was slightly over the weight limit when she checked in for her flight.

I hope you can see that something like this could happen to a lot of people. As a matter of fact, in May of this year, the Secret Service issued a warning for law enforcement to educate the public on similar schemes. Unfortunately, my sister was arrested in 2014 and never received any such warning.

After her trial, she was found guilty and received the “death penalty with two years reprieve”. She was duped. She was scammed! She trusted the wrong people! She doesn’t deserve it. Although she told me it happened when she was taking a flight to Australia, a journalist said a court record says she was on her way to Qingdao in China on an internal flight. I don’t know the reason for this discrepancy. the death penalty for this.

In the years she was detained before her trial, she cooperated with the authorities, answered all their questions, and produced the emails she received from the organizers but unfortunately, it wasn’t enough.

Since her incarceration, she has developed physical ailments (uterine fibroids and possibly ovarian cancer) according to the doctors who examined her in prison. She has received numerous blood transfusions due to heavy bleeding and has been advised that she needs a hysterectomy, which she has refused out of distrust. How can she trust the same people who have incarcerated her after she cooperated with the Chinese authorities? How can she trust the same people who she tried to help to apprehend the organizers who had duped her?

My sister has never been street-smart. She’s trusting and believes that people are good. Being her older brother, I’ve seen her disappointed and upset when people in her life turn out to be something different from what they displayed. This has hurt her and has taken years from her life.

When I visited her recently in prison, I could see the depth of her depression. She has lost weight; her eyes are bulging. She has an abdominal bulge on her right side, and her complexion is very pale. She told me that she still has to work in the prison despite her illness but that she can’t lift heavy objects because her fibroids might rupture, and she would start bleeding.

After I visited her, I updated my father on her condition. I had to leave out some details of her physical appearance because my dad has recently been diagnosed with cancer and I wanted to avoid giving him an additional shock. I’d also like to share a bit about my father with you. He’s an Army veteran and a retired Chicago Police Sergeant of 32 years. I once witnessed him save our next-door neighbors when their house caught fire. Witnessing that event made such an impression on me as a kid that I followed in his footsteps and became a Chicago Police Officer and retired after 28 years.

Dawn Michelle is my dad's only daughter, and he is devastated by her predicament. In a strange way, my dad's locked up as well. He's almost 91, freshly diagnosed with prostate cancer, has other health issues and is worried that with all this, he's not going to live long enough to see his daughter free, safe and at home. He's getting worn down, just like my sister.

As I stated at the beginning of this statement, my family is getting worn down. We've gotten our hopes up, only to be disappointed, again and again. The hearing that you're having regarding the cases of unjustly detained Americans in China offers new hope. Chapter 8, Transfer of Sentenced Persons, in The Law of People's Republic of China on International Judicial Assistance in Criminal Matters offers a path for Americans incarcerated in China to come home and it doesn't require a bilateral prisoner transfer treaty. This hearing gives my family a bit more hope that not only will my sister, who was unjustly detained, have a path to come home but also other unjustly detained Americans as well. We need the CECC's help, and we need its advocacy to bring our loved-ones home.