

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION

No. 160

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

222nd LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED OCTOBER 5, 2026

Sponsored by:

Senator OWEN HENRY

District 12 (Burlington, Middlesex, Monmouth and Ocean)

SYNOPSIS

Urges US Department of State to take action to secure release of James “Jimmy” Wilgus from wrongful imprisonment in Russia.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



1 **A JOINT RESOLUTION** urging the United States Department of State
2 to take action to secure the release of James “Jimmy” Wilgus
3 from wrongful imprisonment in Russia.
4
5 **WHEREAS**, James Vincent Wilgus, referred to as “Jimmy” by his
6 family and friends, is a New Jersey native wrongfully detained by
7 the Russian government; and
8 **WHEREAS**, In 2016, Jimmy, a talented musician, composer, and singer
9 who performed across Eastern Europe, was in Russia producing a
10 movie soundtrack for a Russian director; and
11 **WHEREAS**, On November 7, 2016, he was ambushed in a Moscow
12 street by four men who forcibly took him to a police station; and
13 **WHEREAS**, After being compelled to sign a document, the content of
14 which was in Russian and indecipherable to Jimmy and which he
15 understood was necessary for him to be released, the police took
16 him to a detention center where he stayed for nearly 18 months
17 before any charge was brought against him; and
18 **WHEREAS**, Jimmy was sentenced to 12 years in prison after being
19 convicted on allegedly false charges based on a forced confession
20 and fabricated evidence following a trial that was closed to all
21 American embassy personnel and others who may have provided
22 aid to Jimmy; and
23 **WHEREAS**, Since then, Jimmy has been imprisoned in penal colonies
24 in the Mordovia and Ryazan regions, where he remains to this day a
25 victim of a broken and unjust judicial system, and whose wrongful
26 detention has been the longest among all American prisoners in
27 Russia; and
28 **WHEREAS**, The penal colony in Ryazan at which Jimmy is being held
29 is notorious for its harsh conditions and human rights violations,
30 and the imprisonment has caused significant health problems for
31 Jimmy, including a stroke in 2022; and
32 **WHEREAS**, The Russian authorities have refused to provide necessary
33 medical care, including magnetic resonance imaging scans, thus
34 demonstrating an urgent need to secure Jimmy’s release as soon as
35 possible; and
36 **WHEREAS**, The “Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage-
37 Taking Accountability Act,” enacted in 2020, requires the United
38 States Secretary of State to review the cases of Americans detained
39 abroad to determine if there is credible information that they are
40 being detained unlawfully or wrongfully; and
41 **WHEREAS**, The law also authorizes the United States Secretary of
42 State to negotiate the release of Americans deemed unlawfully and
43 wrongfully detained abroad through the Special Presidential Envoy
44 for Hostage Affairs; and
45 **WHEREAS**, Jimmy Wilgus has been wrongfully imprisoned for a
46 decade, and the United States Department of State has not enforced
47 the provisions of federal law in place to aid Jimmy and his family;
48 and

1 WHEREAS, It is in the best interest of the State to ensure that the
2 citizens of New Jersey abroad are afforded the same protections
3 under the law as they have at home, such as due process and
4 proscription of cruel and unusual punishment; now, therefore,

5
6 **BE IT RESOLVED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the*
7 *State of New Jersey:*

8
9 1. The State of New Jersey urges the United States Department
10 of State to secure the release of James “Jimmy” Vincent Wilgus
11 from wrongful imprisonment in Russia by enforcing the provisions
12 of the “Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage-Taking
13 Accountability Act.”

14
15 2. Copies of this resolution, as filed with the Secretary of State,
16 shall be transmitted by the Clerk of the General Assembly or the
17 Secretary of the Senate to the United States Secretary of State, the
18 Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs, and each member
19 of Congress elected from this State.

20
21 3. This joint resolution shall take effect immediately.

22
23
24 STATEMENT

25
26 This joint resolution urges the United States Secretary of State to
27 take action to secure the release of James “Jimmy” Vincent Wilgus
28 from wrongful imprisonment in Russia.

29 Jimmy Wilgus is a New Jersey native who has been wrongfully
30 detained by the Russian government since 2016. The lack of due
31 process in the Russian judicial system has culminated in Jimmy’s
32 decade-long imprisonment in penal colonies. His wrongful
33 detention has been the longest among all American prisoners in
34 Russia.

35 The penal colony in Ryazan at which Jimmy is being held is
36 notorious for its harsh conditions and human rights violations, and
37 the imprisonment has caused significant health problems for Jimmy,
38 including a stroke in 2022. This demonstrates an urgent need to
39 secure Jimmy’s release as soon as possible.

40 The “Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage-Taking
41 Accountability Act” requires the United States Secretary of State to
42 negotiate the release of Americans deemed unlawfully and
43 wrongfully detained abroad. Thus far, the United States
44 Department of State has not taken any action to enforce this law on
45 behalf of Jimmy and his family. It is therefore appropriate for the
46 State to urge the United States Department of State to take
47 necessary measures to secure Jimmy’s release.