

Berne's former wife pleads guilty

By CHRIS LAVIN
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Harriet Berne Kavalewitz today pleaded guilty before Monroe County Court Judge Culver Barr to a reduced charge of second-degree custodial interference, a misdemeanor.

Mrs. Kavalewitz, the former wife of Eastridge High School Principal Dale Berne, had been charged with first-degree custodial interference, a felony, for allegedly abducting her two sons — Scott, now 12, and Mark, now 7 — in 1979 when Berne had legal custody of the children. The boys were found last August and returned to their father.

Mrs. Kavalewitz, in court today with her husband, Michael Kavalewitz, a Houston, Texas, investment banker, declined comment after court.

Berne said he was relieved by the plea and hopes the matter has ended. "Reasonably, it should be (ended)," Berne said as he left court this morning. "But we've learned to take each day at a time."

Last week, First Assistant District Attorney Howard Relin said his office agreed to the reduced charge because any trial would have required testimony from the Berne children.

Relin today recommended to Barr a sentence of three years' probation in Houston, where Mrs. Kavalewitz now lives. Sentencing will take place before Barr in late August.

Berne's attorney, Steven Pheterson, said today that all civil suits involving the case have been settled out of court but he declined to disclose terms of the settlements.

Berne has filed two lawsuits, each for \$1 million, charging his ex-wife with physically and emotionally damaging the boys by abducting them. Mrs. Kavalewitz filed a defamation suit in Houston against Berne claiming he slandered her in statements he made to Houston newspapers after her arrest there.

Mrs. Kavalewitz originally had been charged with first-degree custodial interference, a felony punishable by up to four years in state prison, a \$2,000 fine or five years probation.

The second-degree charge carries possible penalties of one year in jail, a \$2,000 fine or three years probation.