



**TESTIMONY**  
**of MICHELLE C. DELAUNE**  
**PRESIDENT AND CEO**  
**THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN**  
**for the**  
**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY, AND SECONDARY**  
**EDUCATION**  
**“PROTECTING MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN”**  
**February 6, 2024**

Chairman Bean, Ranking Member Bonamici, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to be here on behalf of The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).

NCMEC is a private, nonprofit organization founded almost forty years ago in response to an unthinkable tragedy. In 1981, 6-year-old Adam Walsh was with his mother, Revé, in a Florida shopping mall when he vanished without a trace. Revé and John Walsh endured ten excruciating days searching for Adam before he was found murdered 100 miles away. The Walshes channeled their grief and joined other child advocates to create NCMEC in 1984.

The world has changed dramatically in the past 40 years and so have the threats against our children. Today, NCMEC fulfills its congressionally designated mission through a cooperative agreement with the Department of Justice to serve as a national resource center and information clearinghouse to help children, families, communities, private industry, law enforcement, victims, and child-serving professionals on issues relating to missing and exploited children. NCMEC has forged strong partnerships with these groups as well as with the public to further our mission to help find missing children, reduce child sexual exploitation, and prevent child victimization

through five main programs of work relating to: (1) missing children; (2) exploited children; (3) community outreach; (4) educational and professional resources; and (5) family support.

## **I. Missing Children**

In 2023, NCMEC assisted law enforcement, families, and child welfare agencies with over 28,800 cases of missing children. NCMEC approaches each case of a missing child individually to provide coordinated resources, technical assistance, and support to law enforcement and the missing child's family. NCMEC offers comprehensive case management services to help find missing children and support searching parents and law enforcement including: (1) access to NCMEC's 24/7, 365 day/year Call Center; (2) poster distribution and age progressions; (3) secondary distribution of AMBER Alerts; (4) ongoing support for parents, child welfare agencies, and law enforcement; (5) forensic services on long-term missing child cases and cases of unidentified deceased children; (6) analytical resources to develop leads to assist in recovering missing children and those exploited through sex trafficking; and (7) family and peer support for families experiencing a missing or exploited child.

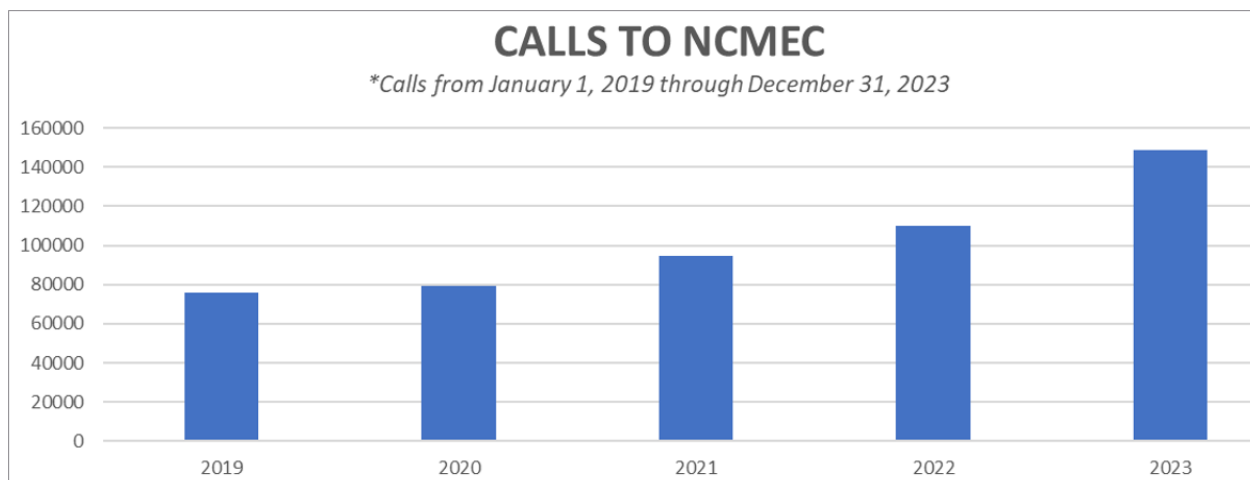
### **A. Call Center**

In distressing times when a child goes missing, it can be easy to remember a phone number. That is why NCMEC set up our Call Center, 1-800-THE-LOST.<sup>1</sup> At any time of day or night, someone at NCMEC is ready to answer the phone. To date, NCMEC's 24-hour, toll-free Call Center has received more than 5 million calls from family members, law enforcement, social services, members of the public, and child serving professionals to report a missing child, seek help regarding an exploited child, or request resources to keep children safe. This includes more than 148,600 calls handled by NCMEC's Call Center in 2023. NCMEC also operates the AMBER Alert Secondary Distribution Program, which amplifies and re-distributes AMBER Alerts issued by law enforcement through the Wireless Emergency Alert system and NCMEC's secondary distribution network. This network consists of over 200 corporate partners that aid in disseminating this urgent messaging to the public. State and local law enforcement in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, parts of Indian Country, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have the capability to activate AMBER Alerts for serious child abduction cases. In 2023, NCMEC was responsible for the secondary distribution of 168 AMBER alerts. To date, 1,161 children have been safely recovered directly because of the AMBER Alert program.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Get Help Now, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2023 (last visited 1/26/2024) *available at* <https://www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow>.

<sup>2</sup> AMBER Alert, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, Overview, 2024, (last visited 1/26/2024) *available at* <https://www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow/amber>.



**B. Missing Child Case Management Services**

When a child goes missing a multi-faceted effort is required to quickly and safely recover the child. Managing a missing child case requires attention to detail, accessibility to a range of resources, and descriptive information of the missing child. NCMEC’s case management team supports parents, child welfare agencies, and law enforcement on missing child cases classified as (1) endangered runaways; (2) family abductions; (3) non-familial abductions; (4) lost, injured or otherwise missing; and (5) critically missing young adults (ages 18-20)<sup>3</sup>. NCMEC case managers compile and analyze information relating to a missing child; engage with parents, child welfare professionals, and law enforcement on potential leads and developments; and coordinate NCMEC resources including poster distribution/media, family support assistance, and analytical tools. In 2023, NCMEC assisted families, law enforcement, and child welfare with 28,886 cases of missing children.

**C. Forensic Services for Long-Term Missing & Unidentified, Deceased Child Cases**

NCMEC offers an array of forensic services to support long-term missing cases and cases of unidentified, deceased children. NCMEC’s specialized forensic artists create age progressions when a child has been missing for more than two years to ensure that a more realistic representation of the child’s image is available to the public. In cases that involve an unidentified deceased child, NCMEC can provide facial reconstructions to help identify the child. To date, NCMEC has created more than 7,700 age progressions and assisted in the identification of over 270 unidentified deceased children.<sup>4</sup>

**D. Analytical Resources to Help Recover Missing Children and Children Victimized by Sex Trafficking**

<sup>3</sup> Pub. L. No. 108-21 – see Suzanne’s Law.

<sup>4</sup> “Our Impact”, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2023, (last visited Jan. 26, 2024) available at <https://www.missingkids.org/ourwork/impact>.

Throughout NCMEC’s decades of operations, we have learned how critical partnerships are for carrying out our mission to keep children safe from abduction and exploitation. NCMEC relies on its public-private partnerships, donated data and mapping tools, and publicly available open-source information to develop leads in missing child cases. NCMEC also provides specialized analytical services for missing children cases where the child is suspected to be exploited by sex trafficking. These services include conducting research and analysis to connect potential victims and/or offenders in multiple locations, leveraging open-source data and specialized child sex trafficking technology tools to develop potential leads, and analyzing online identifiers relating to potential traffickers to assist law enforcement in locating and recovering a child exploited through child sex trafficking.

#### **E. Family Advocacy and Peer Support**

Families enduring the devastating experience of having a missing or exploited child experience unique challenges and trauma with which most people could never identify. NCMEC’s family advocacy specialists offer support for families experiencing the trauma of a missing or exploited child through intervention and counseling referrals for long-term, specialized support. NCMEC is also available to help families prepare to reunite with their children after they have been recovered. Families in financial need may qualify for transportation assistance to recover their child at low or no cost through a program facilitated by NCMEC.

#### **F. Child Sex Trafficking Recovery Planning and Services**

Children who are missing are vulnerable to a number of endangerments, including sex trafficking. NCMEC has observed that many missing children, especially children who are missing from a child welfare placement, are vulnerable to being targeted and victimized by sex traffickers. To address this trend, NCMEC created an innovative program to respond to this issue by operating a child sex trafficking recovery services program to provide specialized assistance and resources to law enforcement and child welfare workers that are working on the recovery of a missing child suspected to be a victim of sex trafficking. NCMEC leverages private-public partnerships, donated analytical resources, and specialized technology to assist in identifying missing children who may be trafficked online. NCMEC also consults with members of its Child Sex Trafficking Survivor Expert Working Group to assist in providing trauma-informed recovery resources and support law enforcement in developing victim-centered plans.

## **II. Exploited Children Programs**

NCMEC plays a vital role in the fight to reduce online child sexual exploitation. As the Internet became more accessible to the general public in the late 1990s, NCMEC observed a growing trend of offenders using the Internet to entice, coerce, and sexually exploit children as well as openly distribute and share images of child sexual abuse material (CSAM).<sup>5</sup> In response to this threat, for

---

<sup>5</sup> Child sexual abuse material (CSAM) refers to content that meets the legal definition of child pornography. Child pornography is defined under U.S. law as an image or video that depicts a child involved in sexually explicit conduct, which is defined as graphic sexual acts. 18 U.S.C. §2256(8) and 18 U.S.C. §2256(2).

over two decades NCMEC has operated two globally recognized programs to battle child exploitation: (1) the CyberTipline; and (2) the Child Victim Identification Program (CVIP).

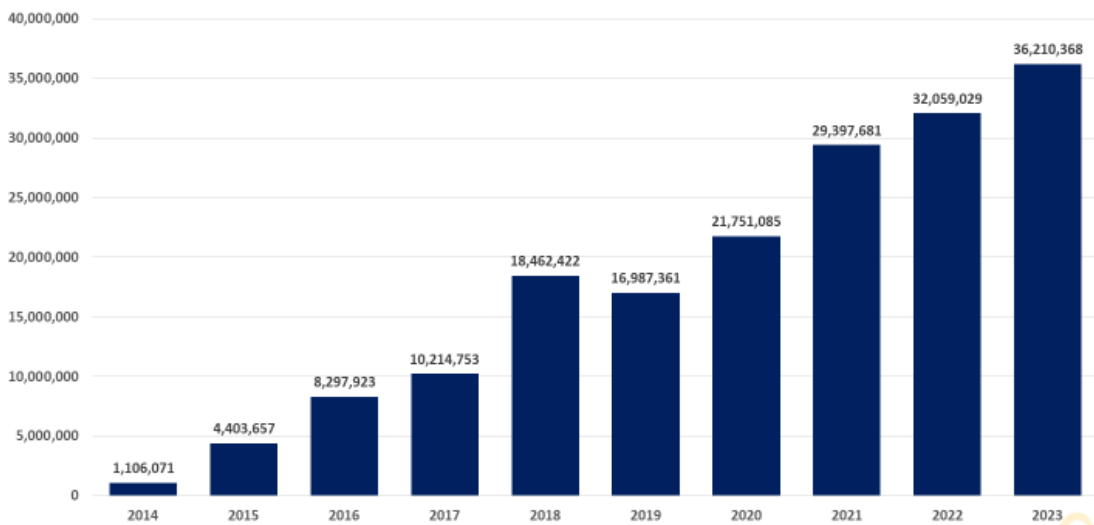
**A. CyberTipline**

NCMEC’s CyberTipline is the Congressionally designated reporting mechanism for the public and electronic service providers (ESPs) to report suspected child sexual exploitation, including: CSAM; child sex trafficking; online child sexual enticement; child sexual molestation; child sex tourism; unsolicited obscene materials sent to children; and misleading domain names and words or digital images. While NCMEC’s CyberTipline receives reports relating to each of these reporting categories, in 2023 over 99% of reports concerned incidents of suspected CSAM.

The CyberTipline is an integral part of NCMEC’s mission to combat online child sexual exploitation. NCMEC analysts review and triage reports submitted for two main purposes: (1) to establish a potential geographic location where the exploitation is occurring so the report can be made available to the appropriate law enforcement agency; and (2) to prioritize reports signaling that a child is in imminent danger for immediate action by law enforcement.

Since its inception in 1998, the CyberTipline has received more than 183 million reports containing over 522 million images, videos, and other content. In 2023, NCMEC received over 36.2 million reports to the CyberTipline containing more than 105 million images, videos, and other content. Currently, NCMEC receives an average of more than 99,000 CyberTipline reports every day. It is important to highlight that essentially all reports made to the CyberTipline are submitted by ESPs on the open web, not the dark web.

# CYBERTIPLINE REPORT VOLUME



*\*Reports from January 1, 2014 through December 31, 2023*



## **B. Child Victim Identification Program**

Tragically, many child victims depicted in CSAM are unidentified and continue to be at risk for sexual exploitation. In 2002, NCMEC created the Child Victim Identification Program (CVIP), which serves as the national clearinghouse for information related to child sexual abuse images and videos. NCMEC has reviewed hundreds of millions of images, to help determine the location and possibly identify of a child victim, to better understand the dynamics of CSAM victimization, and to provide research, analysis, and data to key stakeholders, including Congress, courts, victims' attorneys, and prosecutors. Through the CVIP program, NCMEC has reviewed over 400 million images and videos of child sexual abuse, and more than 27,000 child victims have been identified.<sup>6</sup>

CVIP has three main objectives: (1) to help verify if CSAM seized by law enforcement from offenders depicts previously identified child victims; (2) to help identify and locate unidentified child victims depicted in sexually abusive content; and (3) to provide recovery services and restitution support to survivors, their families, and their private legal counsel.

While federal law does not require law enforcement to submit seized CSAM content to CVIP, many law enforcement agencies elect to submit seized CSAM content through their agencies' best practices to help identify child victims. This partnership is vital to ensure known, identified child victims receive notice when images in which they are depicted are recirculated so they can seek restitution and to ensure NCMEC and law enforcement are aware of new imagery.

## **III. Community Outreach**

NCMEC prides itself on engaging with the public and our partners in the fight to protect children. Our primary outreach focus is to share information about NCMEC programs and services and raise awareness about the issues related to missing and exploited children. We seek to enhance the ability of child-serving professionals to prevent or respond to cases of missing or exploited children. In 2023, NCMEC staff reached 29,153 child-serving professionals through community events, conferences, webinars, and other presentations on child safety. In 2023, we prepared 216 professionals to deliver internet safety presentations, and they provided lessons directly to 13,647 parents and caregivers and 75,024 children.

NCMEC also partners with national nonprofit organizations that provide resources and support to children and families. Through strategic outreach initiatives, NCMEC can leverage these well-established, national organizations to share prevention and educational resources with their state, regional, and local program staff, many of whom provide much-needed direct services to vulnerable children and families. Through seminars, newsletters, conferences, and social media outreach, these partnerships allow NCMEC to amplify our prevention and educational resources with new audiences to encourage early intervention, empower communities, and ultimately prevent victimization. Some of our valued partners include American Camp Association,

---

<sup>6</sup> Michelle C. DeLaune, President and CEO, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, *Protecting Our Children Online Before the Senate Comm. On the Judiciary*, (118<sup>th</sup> Cong.) Feb. 14, 2023, p.6 available at <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/committee-activity/hearings/protecting-our-children-online>.

Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, and Darkness to Light. We also collaborate with corporate sponsors on community engagement, with events like the Old Navy Super Safety Event, which delivers NCMEC safety tips and other resources to children and families visiting Old Navy stores nationwide.

NCMEC engages and interacts with a wider community through our online presence as well. In 2023, NCMEC's total social media followers grew to more than 3 million users across Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, and LinkedIn. NCMEC's social media channels garnered more than 243 million impressions, 11 million engagements, and 19 million video views. We use these platforms to highlight missing children, share emerging trends, and provide free safety tools for children and their families.

**A. Community Education Partnership**

In 2020, NCMEC launched the Community Education Partnership Program to create partnerships with regional and local organizations that can increase the reach of NCMEC's prevention education resources. These programs include schools, law enforcement agencies, and community-based, child-serving nonprofit organizations. These organizations are trusted messengers, embedded in their communities that can leverage their knowledge to address unique community challenges.

**B. Federal Ambassador Program**

Another NCMEC outreach initiative is the Federal Ambassador Program. NCMEC partners with federal law enforcement and military agencies to guide their volunteers on best practices related to prevention education and how to facilitate programs like NetSmartz and KidSmartz within their own communities.

**C. Law Enforcement Engagement**

NCMEC also provides educational and professional resources to law enforcement entities. One of NCMEC's unique programs is our Forensic Imaging Course to build capacity among law enforcement agencies on techniques developed by NCMEC relating to digital image manipulation to aid in missing/exploited /unidentified deceased children cases. This seminar has been conducted at the University of South Florida Forensic Science and Anthropology Department, the FBI Violent Crimes Against Children Unit in Linthicum, MD, and the DHS Washington Field Office Computer Laboratory in Fairfax, VA. Since 2008, NCMEC has provided this course to hundreds of professional domestic and international law enforcement personnel, forensic artists, and analysts.

**IV. Educational and Professional Resources**

As the national clearinghouse on missing and exploited children issues, NCMEC is uniquely situated to identify trends and create educational resources to address the changing needs of children, families, and communities. We provide educational programs, technical assistance, and resources at no cost to law enforcement, health care professionals, and other child-serving professionals who handle cases of missing and exploited children. NCMEC offers these

educational programs through traditional in-person seminars at its headquarters and throughout the country, as well as through virtual modules via our online portal NCMEC Connect. These courses allow us to reach larger audiences and interact with communities as we share statistics, analyses, and best practices. To date, NCMEC has educated more than 410,000 professionals.<sup>7</sup>

NCMEC also offers prevention programs with critical resources for families and child-serving professionals focusing on online and real-world safety, including skills on how to handle a variety of situations ranging from staying home alone, to knowing what to do in case of an emergency, to abduction and child sexual exploitation prevention. Our main child safety education programs include NetSmartz and KidSmartz.

#### **A. NetSmartz**

NetSmartz is NCMEC's flagship online safety education program that provides age-appropriate lessons, activities, and videos to teach children how to be safer online. As we see the evolution of harms facing our children online, we have continued to update our educational materials to ensure they address new and emerging threats like sextortion. In 2022, we equipped 480 professionals to deliver NetSmartz safety presentations, and they provided safety lessons directly to 22,718 children.

#### **B. KidSmartz**

KidSmartz offers interactive lessons to children and families about preventing abduction and empowering children in grades K-5 to practice safer behaviors. This program offers classroom lessons, parent tips, conversation starters, and fun printable activities to help parents, caregivers, and teachers protect kids by teaching rules of personal safety.

### **V. Family and Victim Support Services**

NCMEC provides a wide range of support services for victims and their families including crisis intervention, emotional support, referrals to appropriate community agencies and mental health professionals, peer connection, and reunification assistance. These services are delivered by highly skilled professionals who specialize in mental health and child welfare. Taking a child-centered approach helps foster a collaborative environment in which we can assess a victim and their family's specific areas of need and provide them with appropriate resources. NCMEC also works closely with child welfare professionals to provide the same standard of care and responsiveness to children in care.

NCMEC supports several programs that provide direct services to families, including Team HOPE and the Family Advocacy Outreach Network (FAON). Team HOPE is a network of qualified volunteers who have personally experienced the trauma of having a missing or sexually exploited child. Armed with firsthand knowledge of the overwhelming emotions facing family members in these cases, these volunteers provide invaluable peer support to families of missing, recovered, or

---

<sup>7</sup> Education, *Prevention Education & Professional Training*, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2023 (last visited Jan. 26, 2024) available at <https://www.missingkids.org/education>.



sexually exploited children. FAON is a voluntary referral network connecting victims and families with mental health service providers and other organizations within their communities who provide services pro bono or at a low sliding-scale fee.

## **VI. Emerging Trends and Threats**

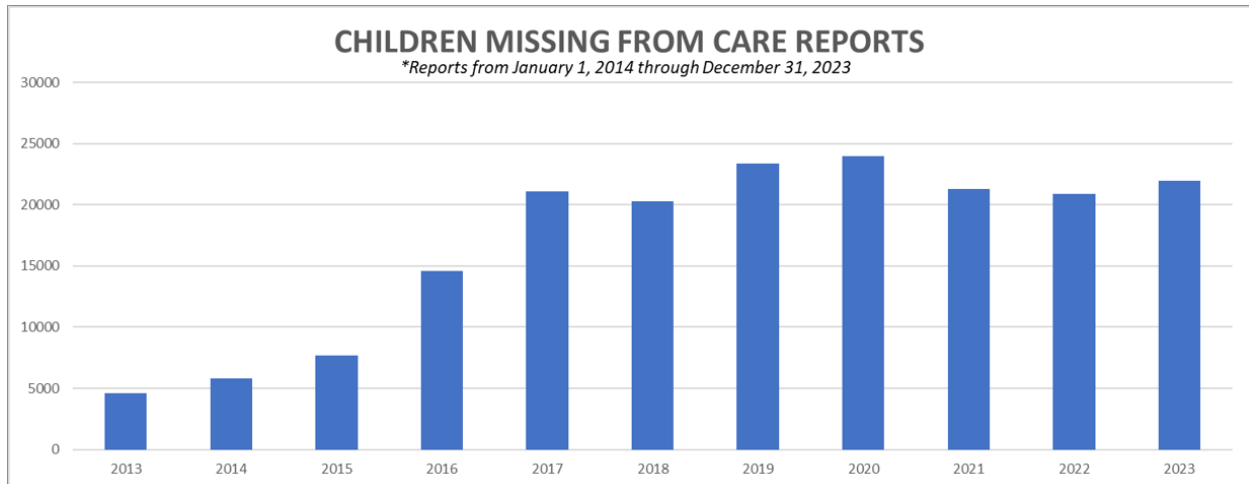
In the four decades that NCMEC has worked to help missing and exploited children, we have seen the types of crimes offenders perpetrate against children evolve. With every developing and emerging threat NCMEC has identified, we have reevaluated our practices and adjusted our programs where needed to best combat these crimes. Four recently developing threats are children missing from care, child sex trafficking, online enticement, and sextortion.

### **A. Children Missing from Care**

In 2014, Congress passed the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (P.L. 113-183), which required child welfare agencies to report children missing from foster care placements to NCMEC, in addition to reporting these children to law enforcement. Before this law was enacted, most children who went missing from child welfare placements were not reported to NCMEC or law enforcement. The passage of the Act resulted in better national awareness and understanding of the threats facing children missing from care and demonstrated the essential need for greater resources to address this issue.

Since the passage of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, it has become apparent that children go missing from child welfare placements at an alarming rate. NCMEC's work has shown that many of these children run repeatedly, and often do not receive the recovery services or appropriate placements they need, leaving them incredibly vulnerable to endangerments.

In 2023, NCMEC received over 22,400 reports of children missing from care, of which 95% were children who had run away. The trends NCMEC has evaluated over the past four decades reveal that when children run away frequently or for extended periods of time, they tend to be running from an unsafe situation or to an unsafe situation. Vulnerable children are frequently mislabeled "habitual runners," a term that places stigma and blame on the child instead of recognizing that the child often is leaving their placement for a reason. NCMEC works to combat these harmful stereotypes by providing psychoeducation in case-based consultations with law enforcement, child welfare, and parents, as well as by providing live and on-demand educational sessions to help professionals understand running behavior.



Whenever a child goes missing from care, NCMEC shares our extensive resources with child welfare professionals to aid in the recovery of the missing child. In 2021, a 17-year-old girl went missing from her placement in Oregon. She had several previous missing incidents and was believed to be a victim of sex trafficking. NCMEC worked closely with the girl’s mother and local law enforcement and employed our vast resources to help locate the child. Shortly after she went missing, NCMEC located active online escort ads featuring the missing child. The information was forwarded to the FBI in Dallas, TX, based upon the location of the ad and to the searching detective in Oregon. A few days later, a detective with the Dallas Police Department in Texas arranged a visit with the child via the online ad. When the child was dropped off at the hotel, she was met by the undercover officer and safely recovered.

**B. Child Sex Trafficking**

Sadly, we frequently witness the intersectionality of children missing from care and sex trafficking. NCMEC’s data consistently shows that child sex trafficking often arises in a situation where a child has gone missing. In 2023, of the more than 28,800 total missing children reported to NCMEC, 1 in 6 were likely victims of sex trafficking. For those vulnerable children missing from care, the risk of becoming a victim of sex trafficking increases to 1 in 5.

Data, research, and testimony from individuals with lived experience inform us that traffickers often target youth who have already experienced abuse or neglect, lack strong support or family systems, and feel disconnected or rejected from their home or community. Unfortunately, children in child welfare placements often meet this definition due to the abuse and neglect they have experienced prior to coming into care, coupled with the ongoing struggle that child welfare agencies nationwide face in locating foster home placements that can support youth who are experiencing trauma.

NCMEC remains committed to continuing our support of child welfare professionals by offering specialized education modules geared towards state welfare agencies, such as foster care placements and child sex trafficking. NCMEC also offers one-on-one consultations and personalized assistance to child welfare workers when a child is missing from their care and

supports development of trauma-informed and victim-centered plans for children to address the root cause of why a child is running from care.

In 2023, NCMEC launched a free, online module titled, “Child Sex Trafficking: Understanding Running Behavior and Trauma- Informed Youth Engagement” to provide on-demand instruction and skill-building for youth-serving professionals to better understand why young people may run away or go missing from care. In addition to these specialized resources and technical assistance, NCMEC provides basic necessities to newly recovered victims. Through our “Hope Bag” program, we work with private donors to fund and prepare bags that contain basic necessities for children recovered from a sex trafficking situation, including a change of clothes, toiletries, and snacks. These bags help provide dignity to the child during an extremely distressing situation.

Child sex trafficking takes many forms, including victimization within one’s family. In November of 2023, NCMEC’s CyberTipline received a report from a member of public concerning child sexual abuse material. The reporting person said their online friend, a child, disclosed she was selling explicit imagery online. After review of the information reported, NCMEC made the information available to law enforcement in the child victim’s location. Law enforcement provided feedback that the child victim was safeguarded, and the suspect, the child’s father, was arrested and accused of sex trafficking and child abuse.<sup>8</sup>

### **C. Online Enticement**

Another alarming trend NCMEC has identified in recent years is online enticement, which involves an adult communicating with a child via the internet for sexual purposes. Children have fallen victim to enticement for decades, however in recent years the crime has evolved into a new form of extortion referred to as sextortion. Sextortion is a form of child sexual exploitation where a child is blackmailed with the threat of sharing nude or sexual images in which the child is depicted with their family, friends, and peers unless the child provides additional illicit content, sexual activity, or money. This type of victimization takes place across every platform, including social media, messaging apps, and gaming platforms.

Between 2018 and 2022, there was a 500% increase in CyberTipline reports relating to the sexual enticement of a child. Sextortion has been one of the most evolving and dangerous online sexual crimes against children. Sextortion cases have increased across the nation leading the FBI to release a National Public Safety Alert.<sup>9</sup> The most recent evolution of this crime is financial sextortion. Unlike sextortion where the offender desires more sexually explicit imagery, in financial sextortion cases the offender attempts to coerce money from the child by threatening to share nude or sexually explicit images depicting the child. The specific pattern and execution of these crimes poses a unique threat to children. Offenders often will use fake social media accounts

---

<sup>8</sup> ABC 10. “Father accused of sex trafficking in connection to daughter allegedly selling online photos” (last visited 2/1/2024) Available at: <https://www.abc10.com/article/news/crime/sex-trafficking-allegation-el-dorado-county/103-a1aacba8-0257-4960-b249-9bc84d047b8b#:~:text=Deputies%20said%20the%20girl%27s%20father,a%20minor%20and%20child%20abuse>

<sup>9</sup> United States Attorney’s Office, District of Oregon, *FBI and Partners Issue National Public Safety Alert on Financial Sextortion Schemes*, Dec. 22, 2022, (last visited Jan. 26, 2024), available at <https://www.justice.gov/usao-or/pr/fbi-and-partners-issue-national-public-safety-alert-financial-sextortion-schemes>.

and stolen online photos to pose as a young woman and target boys to convince them to send a sexually explicit image. As soon as the offender obtains an image, the veil of deceit is lifted, and the offender demands payment through peer-to-peer electronic payment systems such as Cash App or Zelle with the threat of spreading the image of the child to their friends, family, and peers. Financial sextortion is extremely dangerous because the crime can occur quickly, sometimes within minutes, and the outcomes can be tragic. Since 2021, NCMEC is aware of over a dozen instances where a teenage boy has taken his life as a result of being victimized by financial sextortion.

The real-life example below demonstrates how quickly a sextortion incident can occur. The speed of the crime creates a situation where the child victim quickly feels trapped and desperate, which can lead to tragic outcomes:

**8:07pm:** offender makes initial contact with the child

**10:07pm:** child shares sexually explicit image

**10:23pm:** offender sends blackmail message and threatens to release imagery unless the child pays money

**12:23am:** child expresses suicidal ideation and stops messaging

**11:47am:** offender writes to the child's girlfriend, shares image of her boyfriend, and asks if she knows him

**12:02pm:** girlfriend responds this is her boyfriend and asks when the picture was taken

**12:03pm:** offender says he will ruin her boyfriend's life with the picture

**12:03pm:** girlfriend responds that her boyfriend killed himself last night

The online platform did not report this chat to NCMEC until two weeks after the child had taken his own life. Sadly, this time lapse in online platforms reporting to the CyberTipline is not uncommon. NCMEC has received additional reports of financial sextortion where the child victim has taken their own life, and the report was submitted two months after the incident occurred.

## **VII. NCMEC Reauthorization**

In 1984, the Missing Children's Assistance Act (MCAA) was enacted to provide coordination of federal, state, and local efforts to recover and support missing and exploited children and to establish NCMEC as a national resource center and clearinghouse on these issues. The MCAA has been reauthorized and amended multiple times, most recently in 2018. In August 2023, Chairman Bean and Congressman Courtney introduced H.R. 5224, which would renew the MCAA and make important improvements to help NCMEC continue to combat the ever-emerging threats and crimes directed towards children.

H.R. 5224 provides crucial updates relating to NCMEC's efforts to protect children from abduction, exploitation, and victimization. The bill recognizes and authorizes NCMEC's new, expanded programs to provide support services and assistance to missing and sexually exploited children, their parents, and families. This survivor support includes trauma-informed support services, peer support, and counseling recommendations. H.R. 5224 also acknowledges and

authorizes NCMEC's role as the secondary distributor of AMBER Alerts and NCMEC's role in providing educational resources to parents, teachers, and child-serving professionals relating to a range of internet safety issues faced by our nation's children, including cyberbullying, the sharing of youth-produced images, child sex trafficking, and online enticement.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you and the Subcommittee with information on NCMEC's essential and unique role in combatting child sexual exploitation and assisting in finding missing children. Our work would not be possible without the ongoing support of the Committee on Education & the Workforce and your ongoing support for our work to protect our nation's children through our congressional authorization. We appreciate your continuing support and look forward to partnering with you to ensure enactment of H.R. 5224 and to continuing to fulfill our mission to serve and protect our nation's most vulnerable children.

## **State-specific NCMEC Case Examples (other state examples can be provided, by request)**

### **California**

- I. On August 15, 2023, a 16-year-old girl went missing in California. During a previous missing episode, the child was identified as a victim of child sex trafficking. Four months later, NCMEC identified online information which indicated the child may be in the Washington state area. The information was shared with the investigating agency and the FBI. On December 2nd, 2023, the FBI and local law enforcement recovered the child from a motel. In addition to the recovery of the child, two adult men were arrested, and a possible adult female victim of sex trafficking was identified.
- II. On September 19, 2023, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report concerning CSAM. The report contained images unfamiliar to NCMEC's systems. Upon review of the uploaded imagery in the report, several photos depicted a baby girl. NCMEC conducted open-source queries on the information provided. Based on residential IPs provided by the reporting online platform, a suspect was thought to be in California. On September 21, 2023, the report was made available to local law enforcement. Law enforcement provided feedback that the child was identified and rescued, and the suspect arrested.

### **Florida**

- I. In December 2021, a 14-year-old girl was reported missing from child welfare in Florida. The child had gone missing before and reported to NCMEC at least four prior times. In each subsequent missing incident, the child remained missing for longer and longer; she was believed to be a victim of child sex trafficking. NCMEC maintained consistent, ongoing contact with child welfare and law enforcement. In January 2024, NCMEC located an active online escort ad containing a photo that looked similar the missing child. The information was quickly sent to law enforcement. Based on the online escort ad notification, local law enforcement was able to recover the child and arrested one adult male for the crime of human trafficking. Upon recovery, the child was provided with a forensic interview and taken to child welfare. Since it had been over two years since child welfare had contact with her, NCMEC provided them with extensive information on safety planning, rapport building, building trust, and trauma responses.
- II. In June 2022, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report regarding child sexual abuse material. The reported images depicted a young girl orally copulating an adult man. NCMEC conducted open-source queries on the phone number provided by the reporting online platform to determine a possible name and location for the suspect. Based on the information gathered and documented, the suspect was believed to be in Illinois, and the report was referred to an Illinois law enforcement agency. The investigation led detectives to a suspect in a hotel room in Florida. When law enforcement served a search warrant, four minor children were found in the hotel room. The suspect allegedly sexually abused one of the children and was producing child sexual abuse images. The suspect was arrested and charged with multiple counts of sexual abuse of a child, possession of child

pornography, as well as production of child pornography. The children were taken into protective custody by Family Services.

## **North Carolina**

- I. In July 1999, unidentified human remains were found of a young girl estimated to be between 17 and 24 years old. The young woman had been deceased for at least two months. She was unrecognizable and had no identification on her. Her death was ruled a homicide by North Carolina authorities and in 2002, they requested NCMEC's assistance. Multiple resources were applied during the initial years of our involvement to include analytical searches, on-site Team Adam deployment for case review, facial reconstruction, and poster distribution. In 2021, NCMEC facilitated pro-bono DNA testing with a private lab that provides in-kind resources to law enforcement agencies. Using only hair samples from the victim, the lab was successful in developing a DNA file suitable to pursue forensic genetic genealogy research.

NCMEC then facilitated genealogy research assistance through another in-kind partner. During the initial research, the genealogist was able to determine the victim's last name and a possible connection to Honduras. As genealogy efforts were ongoing, NCMEC shared the facial reconstruction on our social media page, Help ID Me. The distribution of that image reached someone who saw the image and believed that victim could be a missing relative. The relative had the same last name and the family was originally from Honduras. Because of this, law enforcement obtained a sample from a relative and performed a direct DNA comparison to the victim. The victim was positively identified and the investigation into her homicide continues.

## **Oregon**

- I. In August of 2022, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from a member of the public concerning an incident of online enticement. The report provided information that an offender contacted a 14-year-old child victim via Instagram, sending the child explicit content and requesting the child's nude images. Based on feedback provided by law enforcement on November 9th, 2022, "a music instructor... was detained during a raid on his house for suspicion of having graphic pictures of children and posting a film online showing child sex abuse." The suspect was detained and booked on several charges.
- II. The Postal Inspection Service provided NCMEC with seventy images of apparent child sexual exploitation of a prepubescent child. Based on a park sign visible in the background of one of the images, NCMEC believed the photos were produced in Oregon. Several non-pornographic images of the child also featured an adult man. A referral was provided to the Oregon ICAC who began an investigation. With the assistance of agents from DHS Homeland Security Investigations, law enforcement was able to identify the adult man as a convicted sex offender. Subsequently, law enforcement located and identified the 8-year-old child victim depicted in the seventy images.

## **Texas**

- I. On February 22, 2023, a 13-year-old girl went missing from Texas. In early March, NCMEC created a short video of the missing child's case, promoted it to the local metropolitan area and distributed it on the Ring platform. On 3/10/2023, NCMEC spoke with the girl's mother and learned that the child's companion saw the Ring video notification and dropped the child off at a family friend's house. She was later reunited with her family.
- II. DHS Homeland Security Investigations submitted to NCMEC several images of apparent child sexual exploitation of a young girl. Additionally, over ninety images of the child were later submitted to NCMEC by international law enforcement agencies. Based on an assessment of the outdoor foliage and playground structures seen in some of the images, the images were believed to have been produced in Texas. A referral was provided to HSI agents in Texas who began a widespread investigation to locate the child. The investigation ultimately led to the identification of the 5-year-old child victim and the arrest of the offender.

## **Utah**

- I. On March 3rd, 2023, a mother reported to NCMEC that her 15-year-old daughter had gone missing while she was staying at her aunt's house. The child posted something about a murder-suicide pact with her boyfriend, who she was believed to be with. On March 24th, law enforcement notified NCMEC that the child was recovered with her boyfriend when they were pulled over at an immigration checkpoint. Local authorities checked NCMEC's website and saw that the girl was missing from Utah. The child was safely reunited with her family.

## **Virginia**

- I. In September 2023, a 15-year-old child was reported missing to authorities. Upon initial conversations with law enforcement and the child's guardians, there were no indicators of possible child sex trafficking. Missing child posters were created and disseminated throughout the area. NCMEC's child sex trafficking team leveraged a variety of donated analytical tools to assist with linking images of missing children reported to NCMEC with active online escort images posted on websites. Using these resources, in January 2024, NCMEC located active escort postings of the missing child in a nearby city. The information was immediately sent to law enforcement who acted quickly and safely recovered the child just a few hours later.
- II. On May 22, 2023, NCMEC's CyberTipline received a report from a tech company concerning child sexual exploitation. In the chat logs, two adult users discussed their desire to engage in graphic sexual activity with each other and their hope to be 'walked in on' by one of the chat participant's 8-year-old daughter. One of the offenders admitted previously molesting a 12-year-old girl. Both users agreed that "age is just a number", "it does not



matter if she sees” and “she can learn how.” NCMEC conducted open-source queries which yielded a location for the offenders in both Georgia and Virginia. NCMEC provided the information to law enforcement resulting in the rescue of 2 child victims.