

**TESTIMONY**

**of**

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**THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN**

**for the**

**UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE**

**“HONORING OUR COMMITMENT TO RECOVER AND PROTECT  
MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN”**

**March 16, 2017**

Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott and Members of the Committee, I am pleased to be here on behalf of The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children® (NCMEC).

NCMEC is a private, nonprofit organization founded over 33 years ago that serves 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 works with all of these groups and the public to further our private mission to help find missing children, reduce child sexual exploitation and prevent future victimization.

Like many nonprofit organizations, we were born of a grassroots response to a personal tragedy. In 1981, 6-year-old Adam Walsh was shopping with his mother at a Florida shopping mall when he vanished without a trace. His devastated parents, John and Revé Walsh, had nowhere to turn for help in finding Adam. In 1981, there was no 24-hour missing children hotline, no AMBER Alert program, no national, coordinated response to search for missing children, no mechanism to enter missing children into the FBI's national crime database, and no support for anguished families like the Walshes. Despite their desperate search, ten days after Adam was abducted, he was found murdered more than 100 miles away.

John and Revé Walsh channeled their grief and painful experience in losing Adam and joined forces with other child advocates to create NCMEC in 1984. Since that time, NCMEC has grown tremendously to become the leading national clearinghouse on issues related to missing and

exploited children. With over 325 employees and hundreds of volunteers, we have forged strong partnerships with other nonprofits, members of the public, industry leaders, federal and local government agencies, families and private individuals who help support our mission and honor our commitment to help recover and protect missing and exploited children. NCMEC provides services and programs in five major areas: (1) missing children; (2) child sexual exploitation; (3) education; (4) child safety and prevention; and (5) victim and family support.

### **Missing Children**

NCMEC approaches each case of a missing child on an individual basis to provide coordinated resources, technical assistance, and support to law enforcement and the family of the missing child. NCMEC's approach ensures that unique resources are applied depending on whether a child has been abducted by a family member; has run away from their home or from social services or foster care; is lost or injured; has been missing for an extended period of time; or has been abducted by a non-family member. NCMEC also provides services and support when an unidentified deceased child has been discovered so we can aid in helping provide that child with a name and identity. Our experience working on over 250,000 cases of missing children has taught us that coordinating public and private resources to locate and identify missing children and creating public awareness are essential to finding and reuniting missing children with their families.

Over the past three decades, NCMEC has seen trends in missing child cases evolve, and we have evolved our programs and best practices in response. It has become increasingly apparent that it is essential for the public to receive rapid notice when a child goes missing in their geographical area. As a result, NCMEC continues to proactively expand both our secondary distribution of AMBER Alerts and our unique targeted social media messaging relating to missing children. NCMEC helps ensure that critical, time-sensitive information relating to a missing child and their abductor is broadcast far and wide. This approach has yielded tremendous results, with 868 recoveries of children directly tied to AMBER Alerts and more than 100 recoveries of missing children relating to NCMEC's social media promotion.

Through NCMEC's work in responding to missing children cases, NCMEC has seen a trending increase in missing children with special needs. These children are especially at risk when they become lost because they are often unable to communicate their name and/or address, may seek to hide in small or enclosed spaces or otherwise avoid traditional search measures. The danger to these children is heightened by their frequent attraction to dangerous areas, such as bodies of water and roadways. Because of the unique dangers these children face, and the specific challenges communities and law enforcement have in trying to locate a child with special needs, NCMEC developed specialized search protocols and guidelines for families and law enforcement to utilize when responding to missing children with special needs.

By virtue of our case work with both missing and exploited children cases, NCMEC has also become increasingly aware over the past few years of the increased risk faced by many children who run away, especially children who run away from state care, and who are particularly

vulnerable to dangers including sex trafficking. Last year, one in six runaway children reported to NCMEC were likely sex trafficking victims, and 86% of these children ran away from social services or foster care. To expand our ability to assist children missing from care, NCMEC supported passage of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act in September 2014. This law requires that states report foster children who go missing or run away from state care to NCMEC, which in turn enables NCMEC to provide coordinated and uniform resources to every missing child, regardless of the circumstances in which they have gone missing.

### **Child Sexual Exploitation**

NCMEC has multiple programs that provide support to families, law enforcement, child victims, and the professionals who serve them on child sexual exploitation cases. NCMEC has three core programs to address the sexual exploitation of children: the CyberTipline, the Child Victim Identification Program, and NetSmartz411. Each of these programs was created to further our mission and to address a specific need that NCMEC recognized as a result of reports we received relating to sexually exploited children. NCMEC uses the information it learns from its CyberTipline reports to identify specific trends in sexual exploitation crimes against children, which in turn helps shape our prevention and safety messaging and materials. As these trends evolve, so too do our resources, programs and data-driven educational materials.

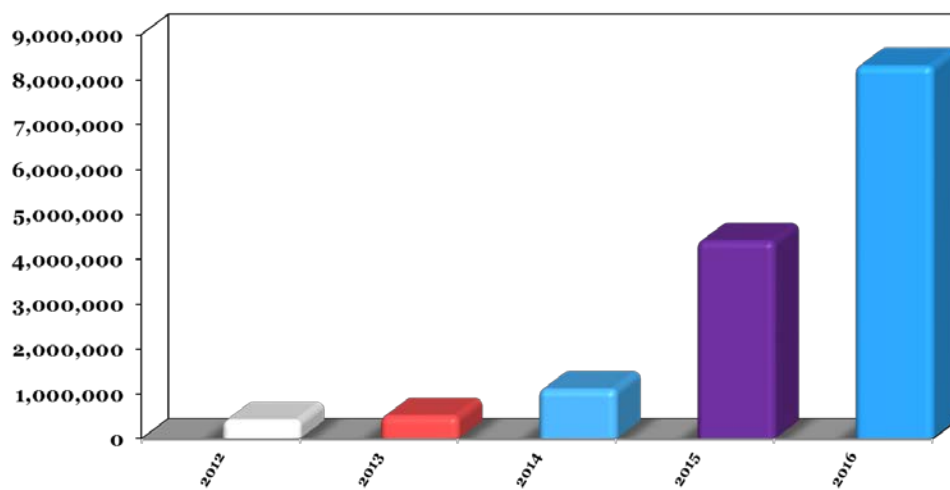
### **CyberTipline®**

As the Internet expanded in the early 1990s, NCMEC began to receive more reports relating to the online sexual exploitation of children. In an effort to efficiently and effectively facilitate our receipt of this information, NCMEC, aided by a private, in-kind donation, launched the CyberTipline in 1998. The CyberTipline serves as the national clearinghouse for tips and leads relating to child sexual exploitation and furthers NCMEC's private mission by providing members of the public and electronic service providers (ESPs) with an efficient method to report incidents of suspected child sexual exploitation, including child pornography, molestation, child sex tourism, online enticement, and child sex trafficking. After NCMEC began operating the CyberTipline, federal law (18 U.S.C. § 2258A) was enacted to require ESPs to report instances of apparent child pornography that they become aware of on their systems to NCMEC's CyberTipline.

As part of our work to prevent the further victimization of children and to discover trends that can assist in reducing these crimes, NCMEC staff review information an ESP voluntarily includes in a CyberTipline report and uses conventional and publicly available information to try to identify a potential geographic location that relates to the subject of the report. After NCMEC's review is complete, the report is made available to a law enforcement agency in the potential location for independent review. NCMEC constantly triages CyberTipline reports it receives to ensure that reports of children who appear to be in imminent danger get first priority.

By operating the CyberTipline, NCMEC serves as a vital and central clearinghouse to further the public-private partnership between the public, ESPs, and law enforcement to help reduce the proliferation of online child sexual exploitation and prevent future victimization. Since its creation, the CyberTipline has received more than 18 million reports relating to incidents of child pornography, child sex tourism, child sex trafficking, child sexual molestation, misleading domain names, words or images, online enticement, or unsolicited obscene material sent to a child. The number of reports received through the CyberTipline continues to increase exponentially each year. So far in 2017, NCMEC has received more than 2.3 million CyberTipline reports.

### CyberTipline Activity



Reflects CyberTipline Reports received January 1, 2012 through December 31, 2016.

The exponential increase in child pornography reports to NCMEC’s CyberTipline is due, in part, to the international nature of the crime, but also to the common use of the Internet by offenders to facilitate sharing of illegal child sexual abuse images around the world. Once content is distributed online, it is impossible to eradicate all copies, and its continual distribution leads to a constant increase in reports.

NCMEC knows that child pornography presents a serious and growing threat to the children of this nation. Through our work, we have seen the lifelong psychological, financial, and social harms to child pornography victims that extend far beyond the actual harm inflicted on these children. The continued dissemination of these illegal images violates and exploits its many victims. Because of this, NCMEC works with leading members of the Internet industry to help facilitate and provide voluntary initiatives that can help to deter and prevent the proliferation of online child sexual exploitation images. Many Internet companies voluntarily take proactive steps to limit access to child pornography on the Internet by using private technology and tools, such as

PhotoDNA, and sharing best practices in a combined effort to eradicate the further dissemination of these images in order to prevent further harm and suffering by child pornography victims.

### **Child Victim Identification Program®**

Many child pornography victims are unidentified and therefore may continue to be at risk. NCMEC operates the Child Victim Identification Program (CVIP) to help identify unknown child victims so law enforcement can rescue them from abusive and harmful situations. CVIP serves as the central U.S. repository for information relating to child victims depicted in sexually exploitive images and videos. CVIP also assists in the identification of child victims depicted in sexually exploitative images and provides information relevant to judicial proceedings relating to child pornography crimes. By helping to determine which children pictured in sexually explicit images and videos remain unidentified, CVIP aids in preventing future victimization by helping law enforcement focus their efforts on identifying and recovering these children who might still be in abusive situations.

Since CVIP was established in 2002, NCMEC has reviewed nearly 200 million images and videos of child sexual abuse. As with NCMEC's CyberTipline program, NCMEC's private partnerships with technology companies provide the tools and expertise that enable our small staff to triage and screen huge volumes of content and to facilitate the identification and recovery of children.

CVIP also plays a central role in assisting private attorneys representing child pornography victims. NCMEC assists these attorneys in their work to obtain restitution and redress the harm created by those who possess the illegal images depicting their abuse. NCMEC provides information related to identified victims depicted in specified series at their attorney's request to assist in litigation and other advocacy efforts.

### **NetSmartz411**

NCMEC utilizes the expertise and awareness it gains by operating the CyberTipline program to offer informational resources to parents and guardians through its NetSmartz411 program. This program is designed as a forum for parents and guardians to obtain basic information relating to Internet safety, computers, and the Internet, as well as ask specific questions relating to their child's online activities.

### **Educational Programs**

NCMEC provides educational programs and technical assistance and resources at no cost to law enforcement, health care professionals and other child-serving professionals who deal with cases of missing and exploited children. NCMEC's role as a clearinghouse enables us to have access to tremendous volumes of analytical information regarding the missing and exploited child cases that we work on. It has been a priority for NCMEC to reach larger audiences with the statistics, analyses, and best practices that we develop through widespread educational programs. Our

programs are specialized by subject matter, including missing children, forensic imaging, and child sex trafficking, and directed to specific audiences, including police chiefs, healthcare professionals, and prosecutors.

NCMEC offers its educational programs through traditional classroom trainings at its headquarters and branch offices as well as throughout the country and as distance learning programs through NCMEC University Online. To date, NCMEC has provided its educational programming to child-serving professionals to more than 330,000 individuals throughout the United States.

### **Outreach & Prevention**

NCMEC strives to transform the analytical information it gleans from its handling of hundreds of thousands of missing and abducted child cases and its hundreds of millions of exploited child cases into audience-appropriate safety and prevention messaging. We realize the importance of not just working to help resolve cases after a child has gone missing or is being exploited, but also to using our knowledge to break that cycle and prevent these crimes whenever possible. As a result, the message of prevention is ingrained in our private mission, and it is clear to all of us at NCMEC that one of the first steps in protecting children is educating not only children, but also their families, teachers and communities about safety risks. To address this key priority, NCMEC continually expands our safety and prevention programs, particularly in response to new and developing trends we see unfold in our missing and exploited case work. NCMEC's main education programs are the NetSmartz<sup>®</sup> Workshop, a variety of interactive, educational safety resources for children ages five to 17, and KidSmartz<sup>®</sup>, a child safety program that educates families about preventing abduction and empowers kids in grades K-5 to practice safer behaviors.

NetSmartz provides age-appropriate games, cartoons, videos, worksheets, safety pledges, and grade-specific handouts and teaching curriculums, to prepare children to be safer online. As we have witnessed the increased vulnerability of children online to certain crimes, we have finetuned our educational programs and messaging relating to more recent dangers, such as sextortion, sexting, cyberbullying, and revealing too much personal information. Our safety programs are created to enable parents and educators to easily select particular aspects of the NetSmartz materials to share with children depending on time constraints and the child's age.

We also incorporate the NetSmartz messaging into teacher curriculums and related teaching materials that are free and downloadable to educational professions.

KidSmartz capitalizes on our private-public partnerships and offers abduction prevention and safety lessons to children in grades K-5 and is a resource for teachers and parents/guardians to help children understand safety risks, learn about self-protection and feel empowered to report attempted abductions or other threatening behavior they may encounter on or offline. Because NCMEC's data indicates that approximately one third of attempted abductions occur to children between 10 and 14 years old who are traveling to or from school or a school-related activity,

programs like KidSmartz are crucial to targeting school-age children and their parents, guardians, and teachers for prevention education.

NCMEC is always seeking new ways to expand its prevention messaging to those who have the most contact with children. For example, one of NCMEC's newest initiatives, Safety Central, is an online mobile app launched last year. Safety Central is designed to provide parents and guardians with a secure online platform to create a Child ID kit for their children as well as to provide current information regarding missing children and safety messaging.

### **Family & Victim Services**

In addition to the case management and analytical support NCMEC provides, we also offer support to families whose child may be missing or a victim of sex trafficking or another form of sexual exploitation. These services are facilitated by NCMEC's master-level trained mental health and child welfare professionals. NCMEC manages voluntary initiatives to expand the resources available to help families, including the Family Advocacy Outreach Network and Team HOPE. The Family Advocacy Outreach Network is a referral system of treatment professionals experienced in treating child victims of sexual abuse or abduction from across the country. NCMEC works to recruit, train, and support these professionals who work with NCMEC to provide ongoing crisis management and therapy, including in-person intervention, to families and recovered victims on a sliding fee or pro-bono basis.

NCMEC also supports families through trained volunteers as a part of Team HOPE, a volunteer group of parents and family members who have experienced a missing or sexually exploited child or who have a child who is still missing and who provide peer support to other families.

NCMEC directly provides reunification assistance when a child is recovered and families need crucial assistance in reintegrating the child back into the home. In addition to emotional support, NCMEC supports the physical reunification of recovered children and their families by working with private transportation partners to facilitate free domestic travel for reunification. We also administer the Victim Reunification Travel Program funded by the Department of Justice, Office of Victims of Crime which enables NCMEC to provide funds to families who must travel overseas to reunite with their recovered child or attend a custody hearing in another country in the case of an international family abduction.

### **Emerging Trends in NCMEC's Programs to Help Missing and Exploited Children**

Throughout NCMEC's thirty-three years of providing services and essential programs to help missing and exploited children, we have seen the crimes against children develop and expand. At each juncture, we have responded by refocusing our messaging and practices so we can best address these crimes against children. Since Congress last considered our authorization, we have seen new crimes emerge that pose unique risks and dangers to children, including online child sex trafficking, children missing from care, and sextortion

In recent years, NCMEC has received approximately 10,000 reports of child sex trafficking to its CyberTipline. NCMEC has continued to expand its specialized resources and technical assistance on cases of child sex trafficking, including expanded analytical assistance and recovery services. NCMEC also provides basic necessities—such as toiletries, shoes, snacks and a change of clothes—to recovered victims through its “Hope Bag” program. NCMEC works with private donors to fund and prepare these bags, which then are provided to children who are recovered from sex trafficking situations across the country.

NCMEC has also worked strenuously to combat the sale of children online for sex. Through our work with missing children cases and our operation of the CyberTipline, we recognize the growing trend and problem of children being offered for sale and bought for rape and other sexual abuse on online classified advertising websites, such as Backpage. NCMEC continues to work with law enforcement officials, the media, private attorneys and Congress to create public awareness of this issue and combat the trafficking of children online.

As mentioned above, NCMEC has experienced tremendous growth in its caseload of children missing from state care since the passage of the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act. Since 2012, the number of missing children reported to NCMEC by state agencies has nearly tripled, necessitating expansion of our case management and analytical resources to support these cases and to provide educational resources and technical assistance to social services as they develop new reporting protocols to NCMEC. Due to the increased vulnerabilities of children who run away from state care, NCMEC will continue to devote increased resources to these cases and to expand its work on helping to prevent and provide recovery services for these children.

Another alarming trend NCMEC has recognized over the past three years is sextortion, a new online exploitation crime directed towards children in which non-physical forms of coercion are used, such as blackmail, to acquire sexual content from the child, engage in sex with the child, or obtain money from the child. NCMEC has seen a dramatic increase in sextortion cases being reported, including a 150% increase in reports from early 2014 to early 2016. NCMEC has responded to the tremendous growth in these reports by devoting additional analytical resources and family support services to these cases. NCMEC also partnered with the U.S. Department of Justice to create a series of public service announcements to educate and inform children, their parents and guardians, and child-serving professionals of the nature and unique dangers to this latest insidious crime of sexual exploitation against children.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you and the Committee with information on NCMEC’s vital role in combatting child sexual exploitation and addressing the issue of missing children. And thank you for your continuing support of the work of NCMEC and our partners. We look forward to collaborating with you as we move forward on a reauthorization bill that continues to honor our commitment to serve and assist our nation’s most vulnerable children.