



**Opening Statement by
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**“The Neglected Epidemic of Missing BIPOC Women and Girls”
March 3, 2022**

**Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties
House Committee on Oversight and Reform
House of Representatives**

Chairman Raskin, Ranking Member Mace, and members of the Subcommittee, my name is John Bischoff, and I am honored to be here today on behalf of The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). I currently serve as the Vice President of NCMEC’s Missing Children Division and have worked to protect children for most of my professional career, previously serving at FEMA in the post-disaster family unification division, and prior to that working in the private sector to create technology to stop online child victimization. Thank you for hosting this hearing to raise awareness about the epidemic of missing Black, Native, and Indigenous children.

Background on The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

NCMEC is a private, nonprofit organization that serves as the congressionally designated clearinghouse to ensure a coordinated response to help find missing children, reduce child exploitation, and prevent child victimization. For almost 40 years NCMEC has provided free resources and services to survivors, parents and guardians, law enforcement, child-serving professionals, and communities through five core programs of work: (1) missing children; (2) exploited children; (3) community outreach; (4) education and professional resources; and (5) family support.

NCMEC was created in 1984 after the nation experienced numerous high-profile missing child cases, including the Atlanta child murders, which involved the abduction and murder of approximately 29 Black children between 1979 and 1981, and the 1981 abduction and murder of 6-year-old Adam Walsh. Adam’s parents, John and Revé, endured 10 excruciating days searching for Adam before he was found murdered 100 miles away from where he was abducted. At the time, there was no coordinated response to search for Adam, no AMBER Alert to quickly deliver critical information to the public, and no place to go for guidance or emotional support. After Adam was found, the Walshes channeled their grief and came together with other child advocates to create NCMEC in 1984.

Today, NCMEC works through strong public-private partnerships with other nonprofits, corporate entities, the public, child welfare agencies, and federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement to assist in finding missing children, providing support to their families, and promoting victim-centered recovery services. In 2021, NCMEC assisted law enforcement, families, and child welfare

agencies on 29,400 cases of missing children. NCMEC would not be able to fully execute our mission without the generous support of Congress, and we are grateful for the critical resources we receive to carry out our work.

When NCMEC receives reports of missing children, our staff works to help locate and support the recovery of the missing child by delivering a diverse array of programs and services. In recent years, NCMEC has seen an exponential increase in cases of children reported missing from state care as well as disproportionate increases in missing child cases involving Black, Multiracial and Native American children. To address these trends, we have worked to expand our partnerships and resources to better address how cases involving missing Black, Indigenous, and Native children are reported, investigated, and resolved and to supplement the needs of families and children during the recovery process in these cases. We also have increased our collaboration with individuals who have lived experience relating to certain vulnerabilities that missing children face in order to ensure our programs continue to offer victim-informed services.

NCMEC Programs to Help Locate and Recover Missing Children and Support Their Recovery Process

NCMEC offers several core services to help find missing children and support searching parents and law enforcement when a child is missing. A summary of the core services most relevant to today's hearing is provided below relating to the following NCMEC programs: (1) Call Center; (2) missing child case management support for parents, social services, and law enforcement; (3) forensic services on long-term missing child cases and cases of unidentified deceased children; (4) analytical resources to develop leads and assist in recovering missing children and those exploited through sex trafficking; (5) individualized recovery planning and services for missing children victimized by sex trafficking; and (6) family and peer support for families experiencing a missing or exploited child situation.

Call Center: To date, NCMEC's 24/hour, toll-free Call Center has received more than 5 million calls from family members, law enforcement, members of the public, social services, and child-serving professionals reporting a missing child, seeking help when a child has been exploited, or requesting resources to keep children safe from abduction and exploitation. The Call Center 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 consisting of over 200 corporate partners that help NCMEC push these urgent messages to the public. State and local law enforcement agencies in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, some parts of Indian country, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands can activate AMBER Alerts in the most serious child abduction cases. To date, more than 1,085 children have been safely recovered as a result of the AMBER Alert program.

Child Case Management Services: NCMEC's case management team supports parents, child welfare agencies, and law enforcement on missing child cases categorized as: (1) endangered runaways; (2) family abductions; (3) nonfamily abductions; (4) lost, injured or otherwise missing; and (5) critically missing young adults (ages 18-20). In 2021, 91% of NCMEC's missing child cases were endangered runaways; 5% were family abductions; 3% were critically missing young adults; 0.5% were lost, injured, or otherwise missing; and less than 0.5% were nonfamily abductions. NCMEC case managers process and analyze information relating to a missing child;

engage with the parent, child welfare professional, or law enforcement on potential leads and case developments; and coordinate appropriate NCMEC resources, including media, family support assistance, case analysis, and other unique NCMEC resources as appropriate to the case. To date, NCMEC has assisted law enforcement in recovering more than 400,000 missing children. NCMEC case managers also work with state and local missing child clearinghouses, non-profit organizations, and government agencies to support model programs and to facilitate travel and related resources to support families of missing children.

As shown in the 5-year snapshot below, the number of missing child cases NCMEC handles increased by 38% between 2016 and 2020.

	Endangered Runaways	Family Abductions (domestic & international)	Lost, Injured, Missing	Non-Family Abductions	Missing Young Adults	Deceased Child	Unidentified	Total
2016	18,960	2,866	246	125	525	5	22	22,749
2017	25,354	2,773	183	107	862	3	101	29,383
2018	23,988	2,136	211	83	851	8	66	27,343
2019	26,816	2,035	219	68	1,054	1	50	30,243
2020	27,387	2,581	176	96	1,092	7	77	31,416
Total	122,505	12,391	813	479	4384	24	316	141,134

Children Missing from Care: The passage of the 2014 “Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act,” (P.L. 113-183), which required state agencies to report children missing from state care to both law enforcement and NCMEC, created a tremendous increase in missing child reports submitted to NCMEC. Since NCMEC began receiving cases under the new law, the number of reports has increased from 7,900 in 2015 to 20,935 in 2021. On children missing from care cases, NCMEC supports the search efforts of child welfare agencies and law enforcement and broadens the safety net for recovery beyond the jurisdiction where a child went missing. NCMEC also provides resources focused on the child’s recovery.

Forensic Services to Support Long-Term Missing and Unidentified, Deceased Child Cases: NCMEC offers various forensic services to support long-term missing cases and cases of unidentified, deceased children. NCMEC’s forensic artists provide age progressions on long-term (over 2 years) missing child cases and create facial reconstructions when an unidentified, deceased child is located in hopes that someone might recognize the child. To date, NCMEC has created more than 7,100 age progressions and more than 600 facial reconstructions. NCMEC’s facial reconstructions have assisted in identifying more than 110 deceased children. NCMEC also facilitates collecting biometric data relating to missing and unidentified child cases to support the work of NCMEC’s forensic lab partners.

Analytical Resources to Help Recover Missing Children and Children Victimized by Trafficking: NCMEC leverages public-private partnerships, donated data and mapping and technology tools, and publicly available open-source information to develop leads in missing child cases. NCMEC also provides specialized analytical services for law enforcement relating to missing children exploited by sex trafficking, including: conducting link analysis to connect potential victims and/or offenders in multiple states or locations; leveraging open source data and specialized child sex trafficking technology tools to develop information and leads; and analyzing phone numbers and online identifiers relating to potential traffickers in order to assist in the location and recovery of children exploited through child sex trafficking.

Child Sex Trafficking Recovery Planning and Services

NCMEC's newly developed Child Sex Trafficking Recovery Services Team (RST) provides specialized technical assistance and resources to child welfare workers, foster parents, and law enforcement working to help recover missing children victimized by sex trafficking. The RST provides guidance on trauma-informed recovery resources available in states across the country and assists in developing victim-centered plans that increase opportunities for youth engagement and reduce trauma responses. The work of the RST is informed by NCMEC's Child Sex Trafficking Survivor Expert Working Group, which strengthens NCMEC's current efforts to support children victimized through sex trafficking.

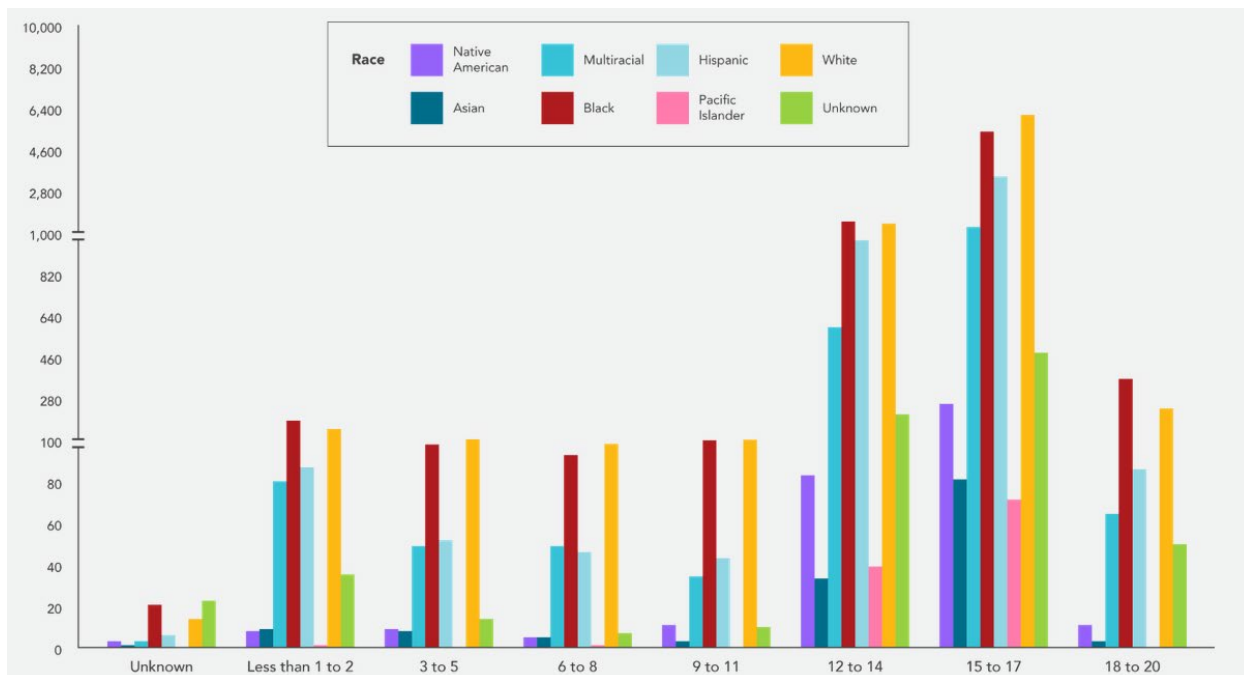
Family Advocacy and Peer Support

NCMEC's Family Advocacy Specialists offer support for families experiencing the trauma of a missing or exploited child through crisis intervention and counseling referrals to appropriate professionals for long-term support. This support is amplified by NCMEC's Team HOPE program, which connects families in need to volunteers who have experienced the crisis of a missing or sexually exploited child and can offer peer support and coping skills.

NCMEC and Missing Black, Indigenous, and Native American Child Cases

After passage of the 2014 Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, NCMEC experienced a tremendous increase in missing child reports and a substantial shift in the type of missing child cases NCMEC received. From 2016 to 2021, 80% of missing child reports to NCMEC were of children missing from care. This rapid increase in cases re-focused NCMEC's awareness of troubling racial and ethnic disproportionalities observed in our missing child cases. Since then, we have worked to understand and address these issues as an organization. In 2017, NCMEC held our first roundtable to address children in state care and the missing child nexus. This roundtable also focused on cultural considerations and bridging the gap between law enforcement and communities of color. In February 2020, we held a two-day roundtable with representatives from civil rights, law enforcement, child-serving, policy, and academic communities. Both roundtables elevated the intersecting issues of children missing from state care, child sex trafficking, and race and ethnicity, with particular focus on the disproportionalities NCMEC saw relating to missing Black, Native, and Indigenous children. The conversations and partnerships developed during these roundtables continue to help us improve outcomes for missing and exploited children reported to NCMEC.

The chart below provides a snapshot of NCMEC’s missing child cases received between January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2020, broken down by age and race:



Further analysis of NCMEC’s missing child cases, cases of missing children believed to be exploited through sex trafficking, and cases of children missing from care, reflects certain disproportionate trends in the missing child cases reported to NCMEC, including:

- 31% of children reported missing to NCMEC from 2016-2020 were Black, which is more than twice their representation in the U.S. population based on Census data.ⁱ
- 10% of children reported missing to NCMEC from 2016-2020 were Multiracial, compared to 4% of their representation in the U.S. population based on Census data.
- In 2021, Black children represented 36%, and Multiracial children 12%, of missing children reported to NCMEC who were likely victims of child sex trafficking.
- In 2021, 34% of children reported missing from care were Black, creating even more disparity in relation to their representation.
- In 2021 60% of all children missing from care were girls, representing another disparity in relation to representation.

NCMEC’s children missing from care cases analyzed by sex and race is shown below for 2021:

CHILD’S SEX	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
FEMALE	12,536	60%
MALE	8,389	40%
UNKNOWN	10	0%
TOTAL	20,935	100%

CHILD’S RACE	COUNT	PERCENTAGE
NATIVE AMERICAN	332	2%
ASIAN	70	0%
MULTIRACIAL	1,959	9%
BLACK	7,087	34%
HISPANIC	3,416	16%
PACIFIC ISLANDER	103	0%
UNKNOWN	760	4%
WHITE	7,208	34%
TOTAL	20,935	100%

Over the past decade, NCMEC has worked to engage Native, Indigenous, and tribal communities to learn how we can best support them. Cases involving children from these communities can be complicated because of the communication, jurisdictional, and resource challenges that often exist with the 574 Federally recognized and other state-recognized tribes.

From 2009-2021, 3,284 Native American children were reported missing to NCMEC. Of these children, only 1,188 of reports included a tribal affiliation, and 2,497 were missing from state care. Other demographic data from this time period shows that 56% were female, 67% percent were between the ages of 15 and 17, and 87% were Endangered Runaways. The data around endangerments for these children is consistent with what we see with all children which is that most have a previous missing incident, and many are in dire need of support services for drugs, alcohol, and mental health. Notably, in 2021 alone, Native American children represented 415 of our 27,733 missing child cases. Sixteen percent of the missing Native American children who were reported to NCMEC were likely victims of child sex trafficking.

NCMEC data only reflects cases that are reported to NCMEC. It is important to underscore that cases involving Native American children can go unreported for a variety of reasons, including the fact that tribal child welfare entities do not have the same P.L. 113-183 reporting requirements as state agencies. We also fully acknowledge that the lack of reporting from Native, Indigenous, and tribal communities is rooted in a deep distrust of outside organizations based on the historical and present-day traumas these communities continue to experience.

NCMEC understands that partnerships and communication are key to enabling our resources on missing children to be utilized more widely in tribal lands. We have invested in building partnerships and relationships directly with tribes and tribal resources as part of our initiatives to address missing Native American children. Almost every year since 2012, NCMEC has hosted the

“Northeast Tribal Conference on Child Victimization” in partnership with the Seneca Nation of Indians, Native American Children’s Alliance, Northeast Regional Children’s Advocacy Center, National Criminal Justice Training Center, the New York State Children’s Alliance, and Native American Community Services. This conference has attendees from the U.S. and Canada representing tribal nations, non-government organizations, multi-disciplinary teams, and non-tribal professionals that provide services to children and families in tribal communities.

In 2018, NCMEC began collaborating with the DOJ Tribal Access Program and has participated in meetings and trainings with tribal leadership, law enforcement, and social services. This program ensures the exchange of information across Criminal Justice Information Services systems like the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). This exchange of information is crucial because in order for NCMEC to intake a missing child case, there must be a NCIC entry for the child so that we have a law enforcement entity to engage with and to share tips or leads.

In January 2020, NCMEC was invited to participate as part of the Department of Justice’s Missing & Murdered Indigenous Persons Initiative working group, which will focus on the development of a series of four guides (law enforcement response; victim services; communication strategy; and community-based organizations) to assist tribes in developing customized model protocols to respond to missing person cases in their communities. These “Tribal Community Response Plans” for missing persons have already been used in pilot programs in Alaska, Minnesota, Montana, Michigan, Oklahoma, and Oregon. Information regarding NCMEC resources is prominently featured in these Plans.

In 2021, NCMEC created a paid Tribal Fellowship position to help continue to develop and maintain meaningful relationships with Native, Indigenous and tribal communities. The Fellowship is annual and 100% virtual to ensure professional, geographic, and tribal diversity. Although this position has only been in place since January of this year, we have already realized the benefits of the trust and understanding we are seeking to build with these communities through the work and active participation of our Tribal Fellow in our outreach efforts. This year NCMEC is also honored to have been selected to present at the National Indian Child Welfare Association’s, 40th Annual Protecting Our Children Conference, which is the largest national gathering on American Indian and Alaska Native child advocacy issues, with over 1,400 attendees.

NCMEC approaches each of these initiatives as opportunities to continue to expand our understanding and relationships in these areas so that we can better serve missing children and their families in these communities.

Closing Remarks

The racial and ethnic disproportionalities reflected in missing child cases reported to NCMEC are due in part to the systemic and historical inequalities that people of color face in our society. NCMEC is devoted to remaining and continuing to grow as an inclusive, survivor-centered, and trauma-informed organization. We continuously work to ensure our staff are educated relating to the historical trauma that the communities we serve have experienced so NCMEC can better support these communities and help address these disparities. In 2020, NCMEC launched the Child Sex Trafficking Survivor Expert Working Group. This working group is composed of a team of

expert consultants representing diverse professional, experiential and cultural perspectives, who focus on bringing a child sex trafficking survivor perspective to NCMEC's work. These expert consultants have identified opportunities for NCMEC to continue to expand our efforts and materials to communities of color. NCMEC continues to expand its partnerships in this area to further our understanding and expand our resources in this area. As an example, we have recently entered into a new partnership with policy leaders from the Georgetown University Center for Juvenile Justice and Reform to advance a balanced, multi-system approach to reduce disproportionate representation of youth of color, particularly youth who are at risk of or are fluctuating between the child welfare and juvenile justice systems

NCMEC is an organization centered around hope. Hope that no parent or guardian has to make that dreaded call that their child is missing. Hope that every missing child will be found and safely recovered. While hope inspires us to improve, it takes action to accomplish goals. Action is required to address the obstacles our Black, Native American, and Indigenous girls face when they go missing. NCMEC will always take action to be the voice for missing and exploited children, especially for those children who are marginalized. Our data paints a painful picture, but one that needs to be discussed. NCMEC will continue to raise awareness around missing Black, Native American, and Indigenous girls of color; to build partnerships and improve communication with communities in need of increased programs and services; and to address issues of disparity that impact the children and families NCMEC serves.

NCMEC appreciates the opportunity to share this information with you today relating to the complicated issues of missing Black, Native American, and Indigenous children. We look forward to continuing to work with this Subcommittee going forward relating to these issues and to share case trends and discuss potential legislative solutions.

ⁱ United States Census Bureau, *QuickFacts United States*, Population Estimates, July 1, 2021, (last visited Feb. 28, 2021), available at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045221>.