



**United States House Oversight and Government Reform Committee  
Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and Government Innovation**

**“Using Modern Tools to Counter Human Trafficking”**

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**I. Background**

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) is a private, nonprofit organization created in response to an unthinkable tragedy. In 1981, 6-year-old Adam Walsh was with his mother in a Florida shopping mall when he vanished without a trace. Adam’s parents, Revé and John Walsh, endured 10 excruciating days searching for Adam before he was found murdered 100 miles away. The Walshes channeled their grief and came together with other child advocates to create NCMEC in 1984. Over the past 41 years, NCMEC has grown into the nation’s largest and most influential child protection organization. Today NCMEC fulfills its Congressionally-designated mission to help find missing children, combat child sexual exploitation, and prevent child victimization through five core programs of work relating to: (1) missing children; (2) exploited children; (3) community outreach; (4) educational and professional resources; and (5) family support.

Child sex trafficking is a form of child abuse that occurs when a child under 18 is advertised, solicited or exploited through a commercial sex act that is traded for money, food, shelter, drugs or anything else of value. As part of its mission, NCMEC responds to reports of child sex trafficking; utilizes unique analytical tools to help us identify missing children trafficked for sex and locate child victims; trains law enforcement and child-serving professionals on indicators of child sex trafficking and NCMEC resources; and provides family/peer support and recovery services assistance. NCMEC has responded to reports of child sex trafficking from all 50 states, Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico and from urban, suburban, rural, and tribal communities. These reports include non-familial trafficking involving pimps, romantic partners, or gang members; familial trafficking where children are victimized by their father, mother, or another family member while living at home; and children who have run from home or the care of child welfare and are targeted by traffickers and buyers who prey on the child’s need for love, acceptance, food, and shelter. NCMEC’s programs and services to combat child sex trafficking are informed by our collaboration with a broad group of consultants who have lived experience relating to trafficking and child sexual exploitation.

Child sex trafficking is a technology-facilitated crime. Many children are first approached by an offender and groomed for trafficking online, and traffickers and buyers advertise, sell, and purchase children for sex online. Yet, technology is also crucial to NCMEC's efforts to support law enforcement in locating and recovering victims of child sex trafficking. NCMEC utilizes technology specifically tailored to combat online sex trafficking as well as publicly available data tools and emerging technologies incorporating artificial intelligence, image matching, and sophisticated mapping techniques. While technology too often facilitates the online exploitation of children, including through sex trafficking, NCMEC strives to find opportunities to leverage technology to help recover trafficked children and to support NCMEC's life-saving child protection mission. Behind each report we receive is a child who is demonstrating incredible resilience while facing unimaginable horrors. Technology is a crucial force multiplier to help us surface crucial information from large volumes of data, enabling NCMEC to more quickly and efficiently develop leads and information, and ensuring the most comprehensive information possible is provided to law enforcement to recover a child.

## **II. Child Sex Trafficking Cases Submitted to NCMEC**

### **A. NCMEC's Role as a Clearinghouse for Missing and Exploited Child Cases**

In its role as the national clearinghouse for reports relating to both missing and exploited children, NCMEC is uniquely situated to identify and respond to child sex trafficking cases. We receive exploitation reports relating to children victimized by sex trafficking and missing child cases that through NCMEC's analysis determine the child is being trafficked for sex.

For over 27 years, NCMEC has operated the CyberTipline, the nation's centralized reporting mechanism for members of the public and online platforms to submit reports of suspected online enticement of children for sexual acts, child sexual molestation, child sexual abuse material, child sex tourism, child sex trafficking, unsolicited obscene materials sent to a child, misleading domain names, and misleading words or digital images on the internet. Through its operation of the CyberTipline, NCMEC has witnessed firsthand the rise of thriving marketplaces on the clear web<sup>1</sup> where traffickers can openly recruit and sell children for sexual acts and buyers can easily find and interact directly with children to purchase sexual acts.

NCMEC also is the designated recipient of missing child cases, and we identify potential child sex trafficking from missing child reports submitted by parents, guardians, law enforcement, and child welfare agencies. Many children who run from their family home or the care of child welfare are uniquely vulnerable to being victimized through sex trafficking.<sup>2</sup> Of the more than 29,000 missing children reported to NCMEC in 2024, 1 in 7 were likely victims of child sex trafficking.

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<sup>1</sup> Many assume that child sex trafficking (and other forms of child sexual exploitation) occur on the "dark web", however virtually all child sex trafficking cases and reports NCMEC receives relate to websites on the clear or public web, including websites that most members of the public use every day.

<sup>2</sup> In 2024, NCMEC assisted law enforcement, families, and child welfare services with 29,568 reports of missing children of which 23,160 were reports of children missing from foster or state care.

To date, NCMEC has responded to 281,330 CyberTipline reports relating to child sex trafficking. As discussed in more detail below, last year's passage of the REPORT Act<sup>3</sup> and NCMEC's issuance of guidance to support online platforms in reporting child sex trafficking,<sup>4</sup> has had a tremendous impact on the volume of child sex trafficking reports submitted to NCMEC's CyberTipline.

## **B. Pervasiveness of Child Sex Trafficking Online**

Children who lack strong support networks, experience trauma, homelessness, or bullying are at increased risk for sex trafficking. Child sex trafficking can have devastating immediate and long-term consequences, including health impacts, psychological and physical trauma, and even death. The complex nature of child sex trafficking – perpetuated through manipulation, concealment, and often force – makes it challenging to identify victims. The rising volume of reports highlights the increased need for technology to help identify, locate, and recover victims effectively and break the cycle of exploitation through intentional, trauma-informed, and victim-centered engagement.

While sex trafficking of children online is not a new crime, the mandated reporting required by the REPORT Act for the first time is exposing its pervasiveness across online platforms. For years NCMEC had been alerting law enforcement, online platforms, and members of the public to traffickers' and buyers' overt use of the internet to target, groom, and buy or sell children for sex. However, because online platforms were not mandated to report child sex trafficking prior to the REPORT Act, and so few reported voluntarily, we had not seen the volume of reports that would reflect the true magnitude of child sex trafficking online.

We are now beginning to see a more realistic reflection of the volume of child sex trafficking online. In 2023, one year before the REPORT Act was enacted, online platforms voluntarily submitted 8,480 reports relating to child sex trafficking to NCMEC. In the first 11 months of 2025 (the first full year after the REPORT Act became effective), online platforms submitted 98,489 reports to NCMEC relating to child sex trafficking. A six-month comparison is equally startling. In the first six months of 2024, NCMEC received 5,976 reports of child sex trafficking, and in the first six months of 2025, NCMEC received 62,891 reports – an astounding 952% increase.

The increase in child sex trafficking reports submitted to NCMEC enables us to help law enforcement identify and recover more child victims and identify new trends regarding how children are targeted for exploitation and by whom. As we have known for decades, the internet provides unregulated and anonymous spaces where adults and children can interact in ways that would never be acceptable offline. Children are spending larger amounts of time online and often approach their online interactions as intimate, trusting exchanges in which they share details about their lives and vulnerabilities. In addition to being able to mask their true identities online,

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<sup>3</sup> The REPORT Act, which was enacted in May 2024, for the first time mandated online platforms to report incidents of child sex trafficking to NCMEC's CyberTipline when they become aware of such incidents. Prior to this law taking effect in May 2025, the reporting of child sex trafficking by online platforms was voluntary.

<sup>4</sup> NCMEC provided reporting guidance for online platforms regarding child sex trafficking to help ensure actionable reporting of these incidents to the CyberTipline ([Guidelines on Identifiers of Online Enticement and Child Sex Trafficking](#)).

traffickers and buyers take advantage of children's reduced barriers to groom and build relationships prior to exploiting them.

As the volume of child sex trafficking reports NCMEC has analyzed continues to grow, we are identifying new trends and patterns relating to how children are trafficked for sex online. We are seeing buyers target children directly by explicitly offering to pay them for sex acts without an apparent connection to a third-party trafficker. Children are targeted through online enticement and offered money to produce child sexual abuse material, which offenders refer to as a "preview," and then asked to meet in person to be paid for sex acts.

Traffickers also take advantage of gaps in website moderation by changing the images, locations, and/or phone numbers listed in online escort ads after an initial ad is posted to thwart detection. Offenders use direct messages to engage children and then move the conversation offline by providing a phone number or directing the child to an encrypted platform.

As the volume of reports continues to rise dramatically and NCMEC's knowledge of trends and patterns relating to how children are trafficked for sex online continues to grow, the use of technology to support NCMEC's ability to quickly and efficiently identify child victims and rapidly develop information regarding their possible location has never been more important.

### **III. NCMEC's Use of Technology to Identify, Locate and Support Law Enforcement in Recovering Children Exploited Through Sex Trafficking**

Every report relating to potential sex trafficking of a child is routed to NCMEC's specialized child sex trafficking analytical team for unique handling involving a combination of NCMEC institutional case information and a suite of technology tools. NCMEC receives and maintains a voluminous amount of data relating to missing and exploited children. As of November 30, 2025, NCMEC has received 52,712 reports of missing children believed to be victims of sex trafficking and 281,330 CyberTipline reports regarding child sex trafficking. Each of these reports contains a range of 500-1,000 unique data fields. This data is immensely valuable – but only if we can connect the right data points, surface connections between children and offenders, identify obscure patterns within case files, and amplify NCMEC's data by combining it with publicly available open-source intelligence (OSINT) and unique anti-trafficking technology tools.

Fortunately, due to NCMEC's child protection mission, we receive a range of donated technology tools and analytical resources to assist us in identifying children victimized through sex trafficking and determining their location so law enforcement can recover and connect them with specialized services. These technologies enable NCMEC to identify child sex trafficking victims among missing child cases; map different cities and states in which a child is being trafficked; identify potential traffickers and other children who may be trafficked together; and determine specific locations where law enforcement may be able to recover a child. Every child sex trafficking case NCMEC works today involves the use of one or more technology tools.

## **A. Using Ad Aggregator Technology Tools to Identify and Locate Child Sex Trafficking Victims**

Every day at NCMEC, we analyze missing child reports for indicators of trafficking<sup>5</sup> to determine if the report indicates a connection to sex trafficking. NCMEC primarily utilizes donated technology tools designed to combat trafficking online to significantly enhance making connections between missing children and child sex trafficking. These tools include Traffic Jam<sup>6</sup> built by Marinus Analytics and Spotlight<sup>7</sup> built by Canary. Both tools facilitate NCMEC's efforts to search vast amounts of data and images quickly to help identify missing children exploited through sex trafficking and determine where that child may be in real time. The technology enables NCMEC to create connections between otherwise unrelated data and images concerning missing children. Examples of how NCMEC utilizes ad aggregator technology tools are provided below:

### Example #1: Resolving Child Sex Trafficking Case with Ad Aggregator Technology

A 16-year-old child from Georgia went missing after jumping out of a window and leaving in a car with an adult woman associated with a trafficker who previously had exploited the child. As part of the missing child case, NCMEC had a photo of the child. NCMEC queried that photo in Traffic Jam and immediately located an online escort ad for the child. NCMEC provided the ad to law enforcement and searched phone numbers listed in the ad in Traffic Jam to identify several potential locations where the child was likely staying. Using this information, law enforcement was able to successfully locate and recover the child three months after she went missing. The child disclosed that she had been trafficked for sex.

NCMEC also utilizes ad aggregator technology to proactively screen missing child cases for potential trafficking. Based on NCMEC's response to tens of thousands of cases involving a child who has run away from home or the care of child welfare, we are aware that all missing children are highly vulnerable to heightened risks including physical and sexual violence and sex trafficking. To address this heightened vulnerability, NCMEC broadly incorporates technology to proactively screen missing child cases for potential trafficking, even when there are no immediate indicators of victimization.

Since 2020, NCMEC has worked with Spotlight to run data from NCMEC's publicly available missing child posters through Spotlight to identify matches to online escort ads. The results have been extraordinary. From the launch of this initiative to the present, 3,333 positive matches have been generated locating a missing child depicted in online escort ads aggregated in Spotlight. The positive matches include missing children reported to NCMEC with no prior indicators of sex

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<sup>5</sup> All missing child cases intake by NCMEC are screened for potential sex trafficking by asking the reporting parent/guardian, law enforcement, or child welfare professional about certain information including history of trafficking, endangerments, and behaviors related to child sex trafficking activity.

<sup>6</sup> Traffic Jam is an AI-powered tool to combat human trafficking through real-time data collection and analysis. Marinus Analytics has generously provided NCMEC with free access to this technology for over 10 years to use in locating missing children and assisting law enforcement in recovering trafficked children.

<sup>7</sup> Spotlight is a technology tool that reduces the time needed to analyze online ads and develop leads for law enforcement on child sex trafficking cases. Canary (and previously Thorn) has generously provided NCMEC with free access to this technology for over 10 years to use in locating missing children and assisting law enforcement in recovering trafficked children.

trafficking, and newly posted escort ads of missing children known to be exploited through sex trafficking. The youngest child identified as a victim of sex trafficking was only 12 years old. NCMEC and Spotlight continue to collaborate on this initiative by running NCMEC's active missing cases through Spotlight on a weekly basis.

NCMEC often amplifies the power of Traffic Jam and Spotlight with other technology tools especially when working to resolve complex, large scale child sex trafficking rings, including as demonstrated in the following example:

Example #2: Combining the Power of Ad Aggregator Technology with Other Technology Tools

A 14-year-old child from California was reported missing to NCMEC. The child's social worker confirmed she had a tattoo on her face that was a brand from past sex trafficking victimization. NCMEC ran an image of the child's face through Spotlight and Traffic Jam and found a match to multiple online escort ads. The ads were sent to law enforcement but unfortunately the child could not be recovered. These ads also depicted another individual who appeared to be a child. Upon further review, NCMEC determined it was a 15-year-old missing from California who had been reported missing to NCMEC. Based on a review of the online escort ads, it appeared the two children were being trafficked in several cities in California.

A month later, additional searches revealed active ads featuring both missing children and titled "Hot 2 Girl Special". Both children now had the same tattoo on their face reflecting the street name of their trafficker. The ads were provided to law enforcement, but the children were being relocated to different areas so quickly they were not recovered.

Four months later, alerts NCMEC had set up within ad aggregator technology tools notified us of multiple new online ads titled "Incalls 3 Girl Special". Law enforcement confirmed that the third child was a missing 16-year-old. NCMEC continued to receive alerts for new online ads depicting combinations of the three missing children and titled "Incall Specials! Up to 3 Different Girls". After incorporating information from publicly available data tools, NCMEC was able to determine a potential name related to a phone number included in the new ads. One of the missing children also was found to be using a cell phone associated with this name. At the same time, NCMEC continued to monitor the public social media accounts of the three missing children and discovered that one was in contact with a fourth child – a 13-year-old who had been reported missing to NCMEC and identified as a child sex trafficking victim.

A fifth child – a 14-year-old also missing from California – was reported missing to NCMEC. The child's mother shared that before the child went missing she had tracked the child to a hotel room and confronted a man she believed was her daughter's trafficker. The mother provided this man's name, and NCMEC used Palantir Foundry<sup>8</sup>, a data and link analysis technology tool, to further develop this information and determined it was the same man NCMEC had identified in connection with the other 4 missing children, linking all these missing child cases to one trafficker. The mother also provided the man's online screen name, which enabled NCMEC to locate multiple online profiles with variations of the screen name shown in a tattoo on one of the missing children.

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<sup>8</sup> Palantir, a technology company that has supported NCMEC for over 15 years, donated Foundry in 2021. Foundry helps NCMEC manage, analyze, and operationalize our data by making it more easily searchable.

Two years after the first child was reported missing and trafficked, one of the five missing children was recovered. She had been badly beaten and disclosed the name of her trafficker – which matched the name previously identified. Shortly after this disclosure, the trafficker was arrested in a known high-trafficking area in Los Angeles. He was found guilty after a 5-day trial on charges of conspiracy to commit sex trafficking with a minor; sex trafficking of a minor; sexual exploitation of a minor for the purpose of producing a sexually explicit visual depiction; possession of child pornography; and sex trafficking through threats of force, fraud, or coercion.<sup>9</sup>

This case highlights the multitude of data points that often must be compiled, analyzed, and connected using several technology tools to resolve complicated cases of child sex trafficking. Unique technology developed to combat sex trafficking enables NCMEC to overcome many of the challenges inherent to these cases and to support law enforcement's efforts to locate and protect missing children exploited through sex trafficking.

## **B. Using Crowd-Sourced Technology Tools to Locate Child Sex Trafficking Victims**

NCMEC also uses TraffickCam,<sup>10</sup> a publicly-available app that allows travelers staying at a hotel to take photos of their room and upload them to the app's database. This technology tool blends elements of public crowd-sourcing with powerful technology to match location details within uploaded photos. NCMEC is the only entity with access to the tool's search feature. This allows us to select images from online escort ads or images of a missing child shared on social media and search background features against the database of hotel room photos stored in TraffickCam. NCMEC has successfully resolved numerous cases relating to child sex trafficking using TraffickCam, including the following example:

### Example #1: Child Sex Trafficking Case Resolved with Use of Publicly-Available Technology

A 17-year-old child from Ohio was reported missing to NCMEC. NCMEC analyzed the information provided in the missing child report and located an active online escort ad which appeared to depict the missing child. The ad was posted in California, far from where the child had been reported missing. NCMEC used an image from the escort ad to search TraffickCam. The search returned multiple positive results that matched specific room elements, including bathroom countertops, vessel sinks, and towel holders featured in a specific hotel chain. NCMEC narrowed the search to the specific hotel locations where the child had been advertised and found an exact match for a hotel in that area. NCMEC shared this information with law enforcement, and 46 days after the child went missing, she was safely recovered and disclosed she had been trafficked through multiple locations in California.

In addition to working proactively on child sex trafficking cases reported to us, NCMEC supports law enforcement when they request analytical assistance relating to a missing or trafficked child

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.justice.gov/usao-cdca/pr/south-los-angeles-man-sentenced-life-prison-recruiting-teenage-girls-commercial-sex>.

<sup>10</sup> Imaging for Good operates TraffickCam, a mobile application that enables users to upload photos of hotel rooms in which they are staying to a centralized database. For 10 years, Imaging for Good has generously donated access to the app's search feature to help NCMEC identify hotel rooms where child sex trafficking victims have been photographed.

case. NCMEC uses donated technology tools to amplify our analytical support on all cases involving a missing or trafficked child, including the following example.

**Example #2: Child Sex Trafficking Case Resolved with Use of Publicly-Available Technology**

New Jersey law enforcement provided NCMEC with an image from an online escort ad they believed depicted a child. NCMEC reviewed the photo and identified a match for a 16-year-old child who had gone missing from New York. The child had been recovered several months earlier by the FBI in Connecticut and identified as a victim of sex trafficking but had gone missing again. NCMEC also developed information regarding a potential trafficker that was provided to law enforcement and conducted searches on TraffickCam based on image provided by law enforcement. The results identified matches to several features of a unique bedspread pictured in both the image provided by law enforcement and images of a hotel room contained in TraffickCam. Both images also showed a uniquely-colored accent wall and wood or paneled flooring in the background used within a specific hotel in Pennsylvania.

**C. Using Technology to Turn Publicly-Available Information into Actionable Leads to Recover Child Sex Trafficking Victims**

In addition to technology tools that are specifically created to combat sex trafficking, NCMEC also works with publicly-available data and general purpose technology tools to support its mission to identify, locate, and recover children victimized by sex trafficking. These technology tools are not built or intended specifically to combat child sex trafficking, but NCMEC strategically employs these tools to amplify its efforts to recover children from sex trafficking. As part of NCMEC's child protection mission, it utilizes technology incorporating license plate readers and vehicle information,<sup>11</sup> geographic mapping, and public records<sup>12</sup> data in targeted ways to identify and locate missing or exploited children so they can be recovered safely.

**1. Locating Trafficked Children Using License Plate Recognition Technology**

NCMEC utilizes license plate recognition (LPR) technology to help locate vehicles identified as connected to a missing or exploited child. This technology is valuable because it enables NCMEC to narrowly target LPR technology using a full or partial license plate number directly associated to a missing or exploited child and work with real-time data to locate a child. While technology is incredibly valuable to surface and connect data points quickly, analytical human resources and expertise is needed to facilitate these technology tools and review the results. As explained in the following example, while technology can provide NCMEC and law enforcement with valuable leads, the successful recovery of a trafficked child requires immense collaboration and dedication.

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<sup>11</sup> NCMEC has access to donated license plate reader and vehicle information technology tools, including Vehicle Manager by Motorola Solutions, CarFax for Police, and Flock Safety. These tools aggregate vehicle record information and are used by NCMEC to locate missing children and assist law enforcement to recover trafficked children.

<sup>12</sup> Several public records technology tools that aggregate identity records from various public sources have been donated to NCMEC to use in locating missing and exploited children quickly and efficiently. These tools, donated by LexisNexis Risk Solutions, Thomson Reuters, and TransUnion, have helped NCMEC develop crucial leads supporting child protection for more than 20 years.



### Example #1: Resolving Child Sex Trafficking Case with LPR Technology and Other Tools

A mother contacted NCMEC after she became concerned that her 13-year-old child who had run from the care of child welfare was being trafficked near a known high-trafficking area in Los Angeles. The child's mother had confronted a man she thought was her daughter's trafficker, and the man told her that if she tried to take the child, he would come after her. The mother did not know the man's name, but she had a partial license plate of his vehicle and believed he had a gun. NCMEC searched the partial license plate on Vehicle Manager,<sup>13</sup> an LPR database. Because the plate was incomplete, several potentially relevant results were generated. After reviewing the results, NCMEC identified a specific plate that appeared to have been photographed close to the high-trafficking area the mother had identified. With a complete license plate identified, NCMEC was able to determine the registered owner of this vehicle whose physical description matched the general physical description of the trafficker provided by the child's mother.

NCMEC also conducted OSINT searches and located potential social media for the missing child which pictured her inside hotel rooms wearing revealing clothing. The posts also included references to the same high-trafficking area and to being in Las Vegas. Comparing the child's information against NCMEC's internal case records also revealed the child had been identified as a possible companion to other missing children from Los Angeles who were believed to be sex trafficking victims. Just weeks after the mother reached out to NCMEC, the child was recovered in Las Vegas after the trafficker was seen grabbing a young girl by the neck and pushing her into his vehicle. When the police stopped the trafficker's vehicle, they located the child and a 16-year-old child along with several condoms in plain view. The trafficker was arrested and pled guilty to federal charges related to the sex trafficking of a minor.<sup>14</sup>

## **2. Locating Trafficked Children Using Geographic Information Technology**

After identifying a child is being trafficked, it is crucial to determine the location of that child as quickly as possible so law enforcement can recover the child from their ongoing exploitation. Locating missing children is always difficult, but when a child is being trafficked online, locating them can become considerably more difficult. Traffickers not only take efforts to remain anonymous and ensure that a trafficked child's identity is not known, but they also frequently move a child from city to city and state to state – both as part of their trafficking and to purposefully evade law enforcement. Given these challenges, NCMEC uses geographic information system (GIS) technology to aggregate location data from a missing child report, social media, and online ads. This information is displayed on a map with additional pertinent information such as hotels and strip clubs where missing children exploited through sex trafficking were recovered. This interactive display of information on a map has been particularly useful during large-scale events that can create an influx of trafficking to a particular geographic location.

GIS technology enables NCMEC to link and display vast amounts of data and create easily-accessible real-time leads and information that law enforcement can use to recover a child. This is

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<sup>13</sup> Vehicle Manager by Motorola Solutions consolidates license plate reader and historical vehicle location information into a platform for analysis.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ourweekly.com/2025/07/30/riverside-man-to-plead-guilty-to-pimping-minor-girls/>.

especially crucial during anti-trafficking operations that federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies work on together with support from child welfare services, nonprofit organizations, and direct service providers. The key to these operations is leveraging collaboration to locate and recover victims of sex trafficking. As part of NCMEC's mission to identify and recover missing and trafficked children, NCMEC supports these critical law enforcement operations.

In 2024, NCMEC supported 54 national, state, and local anti-trafficking operations. Our support included providing advanced analytical information on missing children and leads related to their possible location. In the past, our only option was to provide this information in the form of 30-40 page PDF reports. Once again, NCMEC turned to technology to find a better way to display and sort key data, and GIS technology donated by Esri<sup>15</sup> helped fill this need. For large operations, NCMEC can now create a map and dashboard to deliver crucial details about each missing child known to be a trafficking victim and potentially in the geographic area where the operation is taking place. Law enforcement can access and interact with the information in real-time to view social media, online ads, and other leads connected to each child displayed on a map. With multiple law enforcement agencies working together during an operation, information sharing and the ability to track current progress on a case (whether a child is still missing or has been recovered) is of utmost importance to maximize efforts and reduce duplication. GIS technology has enabled NCMEC to provide continuously updated dashboards and maps to law enforcement, which enables them to leverage real-time leads and information. This has supported the successful recovery of hundreds of children who were actively being exploited through child sex trafficking.

#### **D. Incorporating AI for Internal NCMEC Link Analysis**

As noted previously, for every missing child case and CyberTipline report NCMEC receives there are multiple data points and crucial information that can be utilized by NCMEC to help locate a child and support law enforcement recovery efforts. NCMEC also uses that information to screen every missing child case reported to us for indicators of child sex trafficking throughout the time the child is missing. Based on decades of data collection relating to child sex trafficking cases combined with subject matter expertise and input from survivors, NCMEC has developed a child sex trafficking risk assessment tool. The vast majority of child sex trafficking indicators are nuanced and rely on being able to combine various disparate information and data points to create a clearer analysis of the child's victimization.

Until recently, NCMEC's risk assessment tool required a manual review process. The growing volume of missing and trafficked child reports provided across our report ecosystem began to exceed the consistency of our manual process. Leveraging an advanced artificial intelligence system with Large Language Model combined natural language processing, we have developed a technology-based system that interprets nuances and connects data and patterns in seconds. This technology alerts NCMEC to child sex trafficking concerns for further review by providing us with a real-time stream of new information being developed in a missing child case. For example, information may be documented from a child's legal guardian, located about the child on their social media, and received from a lead called in by a member of the public. Individually, each

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<sup>15</sup> Esri is a leader in geographic information system (GIS) software, geospatial analytics, and mapping. For decades Esri has donated its powerful GIS mapping software and technical expertise to NCMEC enabling data visualization in maps to help find missing children and combat child sexual exploitation.

piece of information may not contain the relevant level of detail to raise specific concerns about sex trafficking, however, when reviewed together the concern becomes clearer. The use of this technology has developed a safety net that ensures all potential indicators of child sex trafficking are identified quickly and actioned immediately.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Child sex trafficking is an inherently complicated crime due to the anonymity provided online to entice children and to host marketplaces for trafficking; the continual movement of victims to new geographic locations; the immense trauma experienced by child victims; and because in many instances a child may not have been reported missing and no one is actively searching for them. The use of technology – both specific technology tools created to combat sex trafficking and large-scale AI and data aggregator technology – are essential to enable NCMEC and law enforcement to combat these crimes and recover children from severe victimization. NCMEC is appreciative of the opportunity provided by this Subcommittee to share how we use technology to help recover children from sex trafficking. We look forward to working with this Subcommittee and Congress to continue sharing information about NCMEC's efforts to combat child sex trafficking and how we can ensure there is adequate support for crucial technology tools. Just as offenders continue to evolve methods to entice and traffic children online, we must continue to have access to evolving technology tools so we can work with law enforcement to protect our nation's children.