

CONGRESSWOMAN SHEILA JACKSON LEE OF TEXAS

**RANKING MEMBER OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME AND
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SURVEILLANCE**

**OPENING STATEMENT FOR THE HEARING “A VOICE FOR THE
VOICELESS – CSAM IDENTIFICATION”**

Wednesday, March 6, 2024, at 10:00 a.m.

2141 Rayburn House Office Building

- Thank you, Chairman Biggs, for convening this hearing to address a difficult topic – the online exploitation of children – namely the identification of victims of child sexual abuse material, also known as CSAM.
- Children are among our society’s most precious and vulnerable. They are fully dependent on “the grownups” to keep them safe from harm, and they deserve the greatest protections our laws can provide.

- As both a mother and grandmother, I can think of no role more important than protecting those who cannot protect themselves.
- While much progress has been made in preventing crimes against children, as well as investigating and prosecuting the offenders, there is still much more to be done.
- Many years ago, we began the process of examining child exploitation laws to evaluate their effectiveness and to determine whether there was a need to strengthen or modify those laws to reflect changes in offender behavior and technological advancements. Congress enacted a number of laws to protect children from exploitation, to increase penalties for the worst offenders, and to provide restoration and healing to victims. We clarified statutory ambiguities to provide restitution more effectively to identified victims of CSAM.
- Now we must turn our focus towards identifying more CSAM victims, more effectively because sadly, the number of images and videos distributed and traded globally continues to expand exponentially.
- It is my hope that today's witnesses will help us identify the best opportunities for Congress to assist in the identification

and rescue of the children whose victimization is captured in those images.

- We know that the law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and advocates are more than capable of identifying CSAM victims. We know that they are willing to conduct investigations and operations to locate and rescue them. But we also know that these dedicated public servants are currently overburdened.
- They must contend with not only the sheer number of images circulating online, but also the challenges presented by various advancements in technology that purveyors and consumers of CSAM exploit to hide their identities and locations. And yet, these men and women, like our witnesses today, continue to do the work – day in and day out.
- But they should not be required to do what they can with what they have – because every image received in a tip is a record of the sexual abuse of an actual child – a child who might still be in the hands of their abuser. That is why we are here today – to determine how we can help identify those children and rescue them from abuse.

- I hope today's witnesses will help us understand what it truly takes to identify these children – the time, the resources, and, yes, even the emotional dexterity necessary to repeatedly view these horrific images.
- Congress should have no reservations when called upon to fully authorize funding to the agencies and organizations dedicated to finding CSAM victims.
- Neither the extent of the problem nor the need can be underestimated. NCMEC reports that today, the CyberTipline has received more than 92 million reports and that the Child Victim Identification Program has reviewed more than 331 million images and videos – more than 25 million images each year.
- NCMEC partners with the tech industry, other nongovernmental agencies, and federal law enforcement, including the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces.
- These task forces handle the bulk of the CyberTipline reports, working to identify victims and perpetrators – often on shoestring budgets. Since inception of the program, the ICAC Task Forces have reviewed 7 million reports of online child exploitation, resulting in the arrest of more than 134,000 people.

- In fiscal year 2023, more than 71,000 law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and other professionals were trained in techniques to investigate and prosecute ICAC-related cases.
- Although the Task Force program counts upon its membership 5,400 law enforcement agencies and prosecutors' offices, task force members are never singularly dedicated to the identification of CSAM victims. We can and we must do better. Imagine the impact of just these programs, if Congress fully funded them to their authorization levels.
- In FY 2022, 1,170 child victims were identified and/or rescued through investigations supported by Homeland Security and Investigations Cyber Crimes Center's Child Exploitation Investigations Unit. Reportedly, this center – often referred to as C3 – has just 10 specialists focused on identifying and rescuing victims. Altogether, this unit has identified and/or rescued more than 11,000 child victims of sexual exploitation. Programs such as these deserve our unequivocal support.
- While I know we all wish child exploitation could be fully eradicated here and abroad, the problem still persists. It is up to Congress to provide our warriors with the armor they

need to win the battle against CSAM. I pray that our discussion today will bring us closer to achieving that goal.

- Thank you.