



**NATIONAL
CHILD ID
PROGRAM**

Executive Summary

A missing or runaway child is every parent's worst nightmare.

Each year, roughly 360,000 children are reported missing to the FBI's National Crime Information Center's (NCIC) Missing Persons File across the United States.ⁱ The actual number of runaway and missing children nationally is likely closer to 2 million children. Various federal agencies currently cite a report from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) which estimates between 1.5 million and 2.6 million children and adolescents run away each yearⁱⁱ. The American Association of Pediatrics estimates 1 in 20 youth run away from home annually which equates to 2.3 million children across the United States.ⁱⁱⁱ

Globally, reports indicate human trafficking is up 25%, including a 31% increase in the number of children trafficking victims since 2019.^{iv} Vice President J.D. Vance has cited studies showing an additional 320,000 migrant children, who crossed the border without their parents, are missing in the United States.^v

Minority communities are disproportionately impacted by these issues. African American girls aged 11-21 are four times more likely to go missing than their white counterparts.^{vi} Fifty-nine percent of all missing children are persons of color.^{vii} The reality is we do not know how severe the true minority and missing problem is nationally due to inconsistent demographic data and different reporting standards across the country. Similarly, studies show that media coverage about missing children tend to inaccurately or fail to report the number of minority and missing children across the country.^{viii}

This is even more true for our 574 federally recognized tribal Nations. The missing and murdered Indigenous women and relatives' problem is severe and should be a priority for the new Administration. In a report from October 2021, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) stated violence against American Indian and Alaska Native women has reached devastating levels on tribal lands, in Alaska Native villages, and in urban centers; yet this violence continues to experience a lack of comprehensive reporting and prosecution at the federal, state, and local levels.^{ix} Research from Canada indicates indigenous women are 400% more likely to go missing than other Canadians.^x

At the 2024 National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) National Training Conference in New Orleans, Louisiana, we hosted a panel titled "Sounding the Alarm: Bringing Awareness and Understanding to a National Epidemic, Murdered and Missing People of Color," which concluded that the first hours of any search for a missing child are the most important and additional funding is needed on a federal, state, and local level to tackle the runaway and missing child crisis plaguing black and tribal communities. The additional funding must include resources for prevention, training, education, and awareness.

Reports indicate a missing or runaway child is propositioned for exploitation within two to forty-eight hours of going missing.^{xi} Similarly, research indicates up to 40% of runaways end up being sexually trafficked or exploited.^{xii} Missing and runaway children are significantly at-risk for drug, gang, and human trafficking activity.^{xiii} Running away from home in and of itself is not a crime which makes it harder for law enforcement to locate and record these incidents. Typically, it is not until a runaway commits a crime, often out of necessity or while being trafficked, that they come onto the radar of law enforcement.

Preliminary internal research by NOBLE has indicated 13 states represent the largest amount of reported missing children based on raw numbers and per capita statistics. They are California, Texas, Florida, Georgia, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Alaska, Washington, Arizona, Michigan, and Nevada. These states are located in all six regions of our organization and provide a broad picture of missing children nationally.

However, despite the disproportionate number of minority and Indigenous children missing, most states do not provide comprehensive data into the age, race, or gender of missing children reports. This lack of standardized demographic information about missing and runaway children in the states provides a hazy picture of just how bad the minority and missing crisis truly is. Oftentimes, within states there are discrepancies in data reporting. In states where missing and runaway children are underreported, these victims are sometimes categorized as offenders with criminal records for prostitution and other crimes associated with running away. It is not a crime to run away, however drugs, gangs, and human trafficking are all the underbelly of a dark criminal world.

For instance, last year, Louisiana's human trafficking report indicates more than 1,400 children human trafficking victims while National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)/NCIC reported 310 missing children in the state. When reviewing all 50 state reports on human trafficking and missing children, states and federal agencies should look to North Carolina's report as a model for comprehensive demographic reporting. The North Carolina Center for Missing Persons has documented 13,851 missing persons cases this year, with 585 remaining active.^{xiv} Conversely, the federal National Missing and Unidentified Persons System lists 627 open missing persons cases with 1,122 resolved cases.^{xv}

The disparity in reporting, awareness, prevention, training, and community policing tools is why NOBLE is a part of a Minority and Missing Initiative coalition designed to bridge the information gap and increase prevention, awareness, and coordination between law enforcement and communities across America. This coalition includes the Safety Blitz Foundation's National Child ID Program, NFL Alumni Association's Caring for Kids Campaign, the Pro Football Hall of Fame, the National Congress of American Indians, FBI-Law Enforcement Executives Development Association (FBI-LEEDA), and National Night Out.

A case study for how communities of color prevent, educate, raise awareness, and properly tackle this problem is found in Hazel Crest, Illinois. Hazel Crest is part of the Chicagoland area and Police Chief Mitchell Davis is currently the Second Vice President of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, former President of the Illinois Chiefs of Police Association, and serves on the Board of Directors for the International Association of

Chiefs of Police. Over the past three years, Chief Davis has worked with the Cook County Sheriff, Congresswoman Robyn Kelley, National Night Out, NOBLE, the National Child ID Program, and NFL alumni such as Mike Singletary to tackle this problem.

Chief Davis' success shows how the distribution of child ID kits and tools offered by NOBLE places the right priority on missing children of color and how to overcome unique challenges in reporting, investigative success, and public awareness. Chief Davis was able to bring together national, state, and local support needed. A key part of Chief Davis' success, especially true for most communities of color, is understanding the impact of barriers such as trust, and how to communicate and utilize resource availability such as child id kits which are a helpful conversation starter for parents.

Populations of color are most skeptical of law enforcement fingerprinting or keeping fingerprints of our children. This is why NOBLE uses an inkless Child ID kit which does not enter a database and has been vetted by the FBI and is in use by state and local law enforcement across the country. NOBLE has made significant in-roads to building trust amongst the community through various programs, such as the Youth Leadership Conference.

Additionally, NOBLE is working with its members and partners to identify best practices for education, training, and public awareness with law enforcement agencies, schools, parents, and media outlets. This will include modules for reporting, investigation, and prevention critical to tackling America's minority and missing problem. However, much more work and resources are needed to have a broader impact on the relationship between law enforcement and minority communities.

Reporting Discrepancies

The current reporting system for missing children at the state and federal level does not capture every case of missing, runaway, and exploited children, particularly when it comes to children of color.

In some instances, state reports are over ten times higher than national reports provided to Congress and the Administration. A primary reason for the disparity between national and state data is that reporting to the FBI's National Crime Information Center does not publicly disclose the number of missing persons by state and the Date of Birth for the person is a conditional field, not mandatory, for entry of a missing person. The NamUs database maintained by the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs comprises of both active and archived missing, unidentified, and unclaimed persons cases, whose records fluctuate daily as new cases are entered and older cases are archived (which are no longer viewable or searchable).^{xvi} The REPORT Act only requires NCMEC to publish data regarding child sex trafficking and online enticement of our missing children. Often, NCIC and NCMEC numbers are used as national figures, inadvertently limiting the reality of today's minority and missing problem.

In our review of Louisiana, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas, state reports show drastically more missing and runaway children than national datasets.

The North Carolina Center for Missing Persons has documented 13,851 missing persons cases this year, with 585 currently active cases.^{xvii} Conversely, the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System lists 627 open missing persons cases with 1,122 resolved cases.^{xviii} NamUs' Bi-Annual report from June 2024 notes 624 missing persons cases from North Carolina, ranking tenth highest in the country, while acknowledging "it does not include information on all missing, unidentified, and unclaimed persons nationwide."^{xix}

In Louisiana, the state's human trafficking report indicated it had provided services to 1,451 children survivors of human trafficking.^{xx} NCMEC reported 310 missing children from the state^{xxi,xxii};

The Texas Department of Public Safety Missing Persons Clearinghouse shows 35,181 missing children in Texas with 169 actively missing.^{xxiii} NCMEC's 2023 year in review for Texas noted they had received 3,069 reports of missing children from the state.^{xxiv}

In Ohio, a 2023 report issued by Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost documented 17,405 children were reported missing. 9,469 of these cases involved a runaway and 367 are still missing. NamUs lists 417 open cases and 746 resolved cases of missing persons.^{xxv}

On the state level, most published reports vary, sometimes even within the same state. Many states do not publish or link to intrastate data and merely provide links to state Amber alerts, NCMEC, or Facebook pages with missing children's posters.

Minority children, especially Black children, make up a disproportionate number of missing children. Despite making up only 13.6% of the U.S. population, it is reported that 40% of sex trafficking victims in the U.S. are Black. In Louisiana, Black girls account for 49% of sex trafficking cases despite only comprising 19% of the population; in King County, Washington, 84% of child sex trafficking victims are Black girls despite comprising 7% of the population.^{xxvi}

As a law enforcement organization, NOBLE understands the importance of communication and coordination in searching for and locating missing children. Ensuring the reporting infrastructure is modernized and streamlined is crucial to facilitating better communication between law enforcement agencies and the public, who can be an additional asset in the search for a missing child.

To develop a clearer picture of the country's minority and missing crisis, NOBLE is asking each of its Chiefs and Sheriffs to request states publish the race, gender, and age of all missing persons reports, including runaways, in 2025.

NOBLE is working to evaluate the current process for the reporting of missing and runaway children and will publish future findings on how to improve the success rate of locating and recovering missing kids and teens.

Missing Children Cases and Data

More than 350,000 children go missing each year, 1,000 children each day. In 2022, 359,094 missing children were reported to NCIC – up from 337,195 in 2021. Black, Hispanic, and multiracial children make up 59% of all missing children. As of April 2024, 3.5% of missing persons in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System were identified as American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN).^{xxvii} The percentage of AI/AN as a portion of the United States population was 1.3% in July 2023 estimates.^{xxviii}

The Federal Bureau of Investigation maintains records of all missing persons reports in the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). In 2021, 337,195 reports of missing persons, involving youth, were entered into the database. As of December 31, 2021, there were 93,718 active cases with 32 percent of those being youth. The Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has partnered with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children for over 30 years, providing training and assistance for efforts to locate missing and exploited children.^{xxix}

Law enforcement agencies from the state, local, and federal levels strive to locate as many missing children as possible. Federal agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the U.S. Marshals Service frequently organize multi-agency task forces and operations to locate and recover missing children. For instance, the U.S. Marshals Service’s Operation We Will Find You 2 recovered 200 missing children in May and June of 2024. Of the 200 children found, 123 were involved in dangerous situations and 173 were endangered runaways.^{xxx}

Further, tribal and Indigenous children and adults face elevated rates of violence, missing, and murder compared to other racial groups. The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs estimates there are approximately 4,200 missing and murdered cases involving American Indian and Alaska Native persons that have gone unsolved.^{xxxi} A 2016 study found 83 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native adults had experienced some form of violence in their lifetime. Eighty-five percent of Native children reported to NCMEC were considered endangered runaways.^{xxxii}

However, the data is not always reported in a consistent or timely manner. A March 2023 report from the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Inspector General (OIG) found that state agencies did not always report children missing from foster care to NCMEC in a timely manner, as required by federal law. Only 33% of the episodes examined by the OIG were reported to NCMEC in a timely manner. The OIG’s report estimates that state agencies did not report 51,115 of the 74,353 missing children episodes in a timely manner as required by law.^{xxxiii}

Now, more than ever, our children spend critical time on devices, the Internet, and apps. In 2015, 73 percent of teens surveyed said they had, or had access to, a smartphone; in 2023, that number rose to 95 percent. Use of Snapchat increased from 41 percent in 2015 to 60 percent in 2023. Sixty-three percent of teens said they used TikTok. In 2023, 59 percent of teens said they use TikTok at least once a day; 47 percent used Instagram at least once a day; and 51 percent said they used Snapchat at least once a day.^{xxxiv}

Technology has provided tremendous value to society, democratizing access to knowledge, culture, and natural wonders while also facilitating connectivity between friends and families across the country and the globe. However, it has also provided another avenue for harassment, violence, and exploitation. Nearly half (46%) of teens surveyed by Pew Research Center in 2022 said they had experienced at least one type of cyberbullying.^{xxxv} According to 2021 data from the National Human Trafficking Hotline, there were 354 runaway and homeless victims of human trafficking. The Internet was the location for 65% of victims' recruitment.^{xxxvi}

Online enticement is an avenue utilized to exploit, traffick, or abduct children through communications via the internet, taking place on every platform – social media, messaging apps, and gaming platforms. In 2024, through October 5, NCMEC had received more than 456,000 reports of online enticement. Reports to NCMEC of online enticement increased by more than 300% between 2021 and 2023.^{xxxvii} Victims of online enticement were found to be younger when compared to overall missing peers, 59% involving children 15 or younger.^{xxxviii} A survey by the Polaris Project of human trafficking survivors showed that 26% of participants stated their trafficker exploited them via their own personal social media accounts.^{xxxix}

Online platforms are not only used for recruitment of trafficking victims and survivors, but also for the coordination of trafficking operations and to control their victims. Thirty-four percent of respondents to the Polaris survey had their social media use restricted by their trafficker in some way. Traffickers and exploiters will threaten to share and to distribute non-consensual images of trafficking or “out” them to their friends and family as a means of controlling their behavior. Some traffickers have utilized platforms to present legitimate fronts to an operation and grow their customer base.^{xl}

NCMEC also reported a 12% increase in CyberTipline reports from the previous year in 2023, surpassing 36.2 million reports in total.^{xli} The Montana Department of Justice reported the Division of Criminal Investigation received 2,640 child sexual abuse material (CSAM) tips, a 230% increase compared to 2021.^{xlii}

Safety Game Plan and Community Resources

To provide for the best possible prevention campaign, a multi-faceted approach is needed to increase efforts and resources to address missing children cases. Combining comprehensive information for parents and educators, strengthening communication and reporting dashboards, and improving the capabilities of law enforcement are critical to these efforts.

Education is the cornerstone of prevention and provides the foundation for child safety, whether online or in the physical world. Providing parents with the skills and knowledge to engage in difficult conversations with their children and to recognize risk factors and behaviors are key to keeping their children safe. A family safety gameplan can ensure parents and children are on the same page to promote and protect children from exploitation online.

This family safety game plan starts with completing a child ID kit, a simple and easy tool for parents to keep their vital information at home and to be prepared in the event a child becomes lost. Having this kit can save crucial first minutes and hours during the search for a missing

child. A family safety game plan should also include talks with parents and children about critical issues such as stranger danger, emergency contacts, and online safety steps amid the growing threat of human trafficking.

Children spend a significant amount of time at school and can provide an additional opportunity to educate and provide services to students. Similar to the expansive use of Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) programming to combat drug and alcohol use amongst teens, Internet safety education programs in schools can impart the dangers and risks associated with online and phone application activities.

Given the connectivity of the current generation of children and teens, online safety resources and education are vital tools for prevention efforts. A crucial part of any family safety game plan should include a discussion of the risks associated with being online and how children and teens can tailor their activities to remain safe. Parents and guardians should also be aware of the parental controls offered by social media platforms and phone providers and utilize them appropriately.

Online safety resources have been created by government and nonprofit advocacy groups but often lack in deployment to the general public. Federal departments and agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security and Department of Justice have developed online safety resources for children and families and NCMEC has created its own curriculum, NetSmartz. Using these and other similar resources in conversations with our communities, NOBLE is committed to sharing online safety and family safety tips.

NOBLE is committed to being at the forefront of providing solutions to law enforcement issues and concerns as well as the ever-changing needs of our communities. Tackling the country's minority and missing crisis and human trafficking will require an all-hands-on-deck approach, partnering law enforcement with the community, public officials, and advocates to pool resources.

A critical part of these resources is the distribution of child ID kits, which allows officers to move quickly in the event of a missing or runaway child. The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs notes the first 48 hours in the disappearance of a child are the most critical to finding and returning a child safely, but it is also the most chaotic. There is no waiting period to enter a missing child into the FBI's Missing Persons file and having a completed child ID kit can help expedite this entry.

Additional resources, such as training and manpower, are also needed to ensure law enforcement are properly prepared to handle missing children's cases. While hiring has rebounded at law enforcement agencies, total sworn officer staffing has dropped nearly 5% between 2019 and 2022.^{xliii} This is at a time when the National Emergency Number Association estimates 240 million calls are made to 9-1-1 in the U.S. each year,^{xliv} often police are dispatched to respond regardless of whether the call has anything to do with crime or violence^{xlv}.

NOBLE is committed to working with the National Child ID Program and other partners, such as FBI-LEEDA, to provide additional training and resources to officers and communities on

responding to and searching for missing children. NOBLE membership is comprised of over 4,800 members from 1,000 communities, providing several outlets to train and educate law enforcement across the country with the tools to increase community policing activity and the handling of missing persons cases. The FBI-LEEDA trains thousands of law enforcement professionals each year, advances the science and art of law enforcement leadership and promotes the exchange of information to improve law enforcement management practices through training, education, and networking among police professionals across the United States and beyond.

This partnership, in part, has developed the Minority and Missing Initiative, which strives to bring awareness to the country's minority and missing crisis. Along with the National Congress of American Indians and its work on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Relatives, the Minority and Missing Initiative strives to advocate for better resources to track missing minority and Indigenous persons and discuss policy solutions to these crises.

The Minority and Missing Initiative has partnered up in the largest prevention education campaign in the lead up to the Super Bowl in 2025 and 2026. Working with NFL alumni from all 32 teams, the Minority and Missing Initiative is sharing prevention tips and child ID kits with families, particularly in the Super Bowl host cities of New Orleans and San Francisco. With hundreds of thousands of visitors to each city for a major human trafficking target, it is imperative that the combined efforts of advocates such as the National Child ID Program, law enforcement officials and organizations, and legendary athletes such as those from the NFL Alumni Association's Caring for Kids Campaign work together to educate families and the public.

"I am grateful for the work of NOBLE, NCAI, and FBI-LEEDA to compile the most comprehensive report on minority, missing, and murdered and missing Indigenous persons, bringing attention to these important crises. "I look forward to continuing our work together to ensure every child is brought home safely to their families," said Kenny Hansmire, Executive Director of the National Child ID Program.

Minority and Missing Initiative Partners:

About NOBLE

The National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) is comprised of over 4,800 members and growing across 60 chapters, serving all parts of the country. NOBLE is at the forefront of providing solutions to law enforcement issues and concerns, as well as to the ever-changing needs of our communities. Our commitment to "Justice By Action" serves the demands of law enforcement issues worldwide which makes NOBLE a valuable asset for anyone interested in pursuing the improvement within the administration of justice.

Among the law enforcement and public safety issues on which NOBLE engages, we hope to highlight the current disparities in the reporting of minority and tribal missing and runaway children across the states. We also seek to provide suggestions for policymakers and parents on the needs for community action and the currently available prevention resources.

About the National Child ID Program

The National Child Identification Program is a community service safety initiative dedicated to changing these statistics, by providing parents and guardians with a tool they can use to help protect their children. The ID Kit allows parents to collect specific information by easily recording the physical characteristics, fingerprints, and DNA of their children on identification cards that are then kept at home by the parent or guardian. If ever needed, this ID Kit gives authorities vital information to assist their efforts to locate a missing child.

Since its inception in 1997, the National Child ID Program has distributed over 70 million kits throughout North America. The program has been recognized by Congress and today works with federal, state, and local leaders, coaches, athletes, faith-based organizations, and corporate citizens to increase the safety of children in communities across the country.

About NFL Alumni Association's Caring for Kids Campaign

Founded in 1967 by a small group of successful retired NFL players, the National Football League Alumni is the oldest, most well-known, and well-respected retired player organization in professional sports. Membership includes thousands of retired players, coaches, front office executives, spouses, cheerleaders, and avid fans. A primary mission of NFL Alumni is "Caring for Our Own" as we inform, assist, and serve players in their post-NFL lives. Alumni are offered a diverse package of medical, business, and legal services to help keep them and their families healthy, productive, and connected to the league and their former teammates. NFLA is a non-profit organization.

About the Pro Football Hall of Fame

The Pro Football Hall of Fame works collaboratively with the pro football family: the National Football League, the 32 NFL clubs and other entities. The cooperative efforts of all of these organizations have contributed greatly to the overall success of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. In turn, the Hall strives to serve as the best historical showplace and repository for the sport of professional football. Today, the Hall of Fame reaches tens of millions of additional football fans each year through broad outreach, such as nationally televised events, an in-depth website, educational and youth programs, social media, traveling exhibits and special events held around the country.

About the National Congress of American Indians

NCAI, a non-profit organization, advocates for a bright future for generations to come by taking the lead to gain consensus on a constructive and promising vision for Indian Country. The organization's policy issues and initiatives are driven by the consensus of our diverse membership, which consists of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments, tribal citizens, individuals, and Native and non-Native organizations.

For nearly seven decades since its founding, NCAI has remained true to the original purpose of the organization: to be the unified voice of tribal nations. As outlined in the NCAI Constitution,

our purpose is to serve as a forum for unified policy development among tribal governments in order to: (1) protect and advance tribal governance and treaty rights; (2) promote the economic development and health and welfare in Indian and Alaska Native communities; and (3) educate the public toward a better understanding of Indian and Alaska Native tribes.

About FBI-LEEDA

FBI-LEEDA, Inc., also known as the Law Enforcement Executive Development Association, a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, was formed. Today, FBI-LEEDA's membership includes law enforcement executives throughout the United States, U.S. territories, and foreign countries. The Association holds an annual training conference in the spring to provide members with up-to-date information and exceptional networking opportunities. In 1998, the Association invited a limited number of vendors to display the latest technology and product lines for conference attendees. This addition to the training conference was so successful that it has been continued each year. FBI-LEEDA's tremendously successful Corporate Partnership Program is a result of the exhibitors' continuing support of the Association.

The Mission of FBI-LEEDA, Inc. shall be to advance the science and art of law enforcement leadership and promote the exchange of information to improve law enforcement management practices through training, education, and networking among police professionals across the United States and beyond.

About National Night Out

National Night Out enhances the relationship between neighbors and law enforcement while bringing back a true sense of community. Furthermore, it provides a great opportunity to bring police and neighbors together under positive circumstances. The state of Texas and select areas celebrate the first Tuesday in October.

Citations

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