

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 7, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby, Vice Chairman Leahy, Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Shaheen:

We are deeply concerned by the results of a shocking investigation recently conducted by the New York Times which found that, last year, over 45 million online images and videos were flagged as child sexual abuse.¹ The investigation revealed that not only are reports of these images increasing exponentially, they are also becoming more extreme and the victims featured in them are increasingly younger. For too long, Congress has withheld the resources that law enforcement and non-profit organizations such as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children desperately need to address this heinous problem. We urge you to exponentially increase the funding for missing and exploited children programs in the appropriations bill currently before Congress.

Alarming, the volume of online images of child sexual abuse is so overwhelming that the FBI has reportedly decided to narrow its investigative focus to images of infants and toddlers. Congress passed a law to address this scourge over a decade ago, the PROTECT Our Children Act of 2008. The 2017 re-authorization of that important piece of legislation authorized \$60 million annually for grants to help state and local law enforcement agencies operate Internet Crimes against Children (ICAC) task forces. Given the enormity of this problem, it is now clear that \$60 million a year would be vastly inadequate. Shockingly, since 2010, Congress has failed to fully fund these programs, appropriating only \$30 million annually.² The relevant

¹ Michael H. Keller & Gabriel J.X. Dance, *The Internet is Overrun With Images of Child Sexual Abuse. What Went Wrong?*, N.Y. Times, Sept. 28, 2019, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/09/28/us/child-sex-abuse.html>.

² *Program Summary: Internet Crimes against Children Task Force Program*, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, available at

appropriations bill currently before Congress would provide only \$85 million for all “missing and exploited children” programs.³ This is woefully inadequate. All of these programs should be funded far beyond their authorized amounts to keep up with the gravity and volume of these images.

It is clear that the resources devoted to this issue are insufficient. The number of child pornography referrals to state and local law enforcement has increased by more than 400% since 2010. Local law enforcement agencies have reported having to make “difficult choices,” including cutting back on undercover operations, which help root out offenders without putting actual children in harm’s way. Perpetrators are becoming increasingly technologically sophisticated, masking their identity and their crimes behind virtual private networks and near-impenetrable encryption techniques, emboldening them to share images of younger children “in increasingly extreme and violent forms.”⁴ The less abusers fear getting caught, the worse the abuse will get. The lack of sufficient resources for law enforcement to address this problem has directly led to more and worse child sexual abuse.

The law enforcement agencies and non-profit organizations at the front lines of this fight are not getting the federal support they need—they are not getting the federal support that they were promised. This is putting countless children at risk. Not only are we depriving local law enforcement agencies of the resources they desperately need, but when we fail to fund these programs at an appropriate level, we send the message that we do not take this problem seriously.

We urge you to ensure that the missing and exploited children programs are funded well beyond the amounts authorized by Congress. Now is the time to demonstrate our commitment to eradicating these unspeakable crimes.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



MARSHA BLACKBURN
United States Senate

<https://www.ojjdp.gov/Programs/ProgSummary.asp?pi=3&ti=1&si=2&kw=&strItem=&strSingleItem=&p=topic&PreviousPage=SearchResults>.

³ S. 2584, 116th Cong. p. 59 (2019).

⁴ Keller & Dance, *The Internet is Overrun*, *supra* n. 1.