



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF

**KRISTINA ROSE
ACTING DIRECTOR
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE
OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME, TERRORISM, AND HOMELAND SECURITY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

HEARING ON

H.R. 3695, THE "HELP FIND THE MISSING ACT" OR "BILLY'S LAW"

PRESENTED

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**Before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
On H.R. 3695, the “Help Find the Missing Act” or “Billy’s Law”
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Gohmert and Members of the Subcommittee: I am pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the Department of Justice’s National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) and to affirm our support of H.R. 3695, the “Help Find the Missing Act” or “Billy’s Law.” We commend Congressmen Murphy and Poe for sponsoring “Billy’s Law” and thank the Subcommittee for their interest in NamUs and this legislation. I am especially grateful to Janice Smolinski for her efforts to raise awareness of the need to report and share information about missing adults.

The mission of the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) is to increase public safety and improve the fair administration of justice across America through innovative leadership and programs. Part of this mission is to provide assistance to law enforcement and criminal justice agencies to help tackle difficult and challenging cases.

I am proud to be here today with Stephen L. Morris. He, along with his colleagues at the FBI’s Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS), have been valuable partners in supporting state and local efforts to find missing and unidentified persons.

The Department of Justice established NamUs to respond to an overwhelming need for a central reporting system for unidentified human remains cases. OJP’s Bureau of Justice Statistics reported that, as of 2004, more than half (51 percent) of the nation’s medical examiners’ offices had no policy for retaining records—such as x-rays, DNA, or fingerprints—on unidentified human decedents. In addition, it is estimated that, nationwide, there are an estimated 100,000 active missing persons cases on any given day.

In 2005, the Attorney General charged the Department of Justice with developing a response to this national problem. In the spring of 2005, NIJ assembled federal, state, and local law enforcement officials, medical examiners and coroners, forensic scientists, key policymakers, victim advocates and victims’ families for a national strategy meeting in Philadelphia, called the “Identifying the Missing Summit.”

Out of this and other meetings came the strategy to develop NamUs, the first national system for both missing persons and the unidentified dead developed for and by those that will use it; the public, law enforcement, medical examiners and coroners. It is a free web-based tool created to assist in the solving of missing and unidentified decedent cases in the United States. The system’s development and its ongoing use have provided unparalleled opportunities for true partnership between law enforcement, medical examiners, coroners, and members of the public – especially the families of the missing and unidentified dead. It engages the public to work alongside state and local agencies to help resolve cases, increase public safety, and provide closure and resolution for the families of the missing. NamUs also serves as a central, online national repository for other missing persons’ websites, state clearinghouses, contact information, legislation and other resources from around the country.

Now instead of having to search newspapers or call morgues across the country to find information about unidentified persons, families and loved ones can search the NamUs databases online. They can be part of the process.

NamUs is administered by NIJ through cooperative agreements with the National Forensic Science Technology Center (NFSTC), a 501(c)(3) based out of Largo, Florida and the National Center for Forensic Science (NCFS) within the University of Florida. NamUs System development has been guided by state, local, federal and non-profit practitioners and community members.

NamUs was implemented in three stages. In June 2007, we launched the first NamUs database, for unidentified decedents. The database is designed to assist in the identification of deceased persons whose names and identities have not yet been established. The system is searchable by anyone, but information can only be entered by the medical examiner/coroner communities.

In January 2009, we started the second phase of NamUs, a database for missing persons' information. This can include physical attribute information like hair color and eye color, as well as more specific information like circumstances of the disappearance, car make and/or model, dental records, descriptions of scars/marks/tattoos and even whether DNA testing has been performed. It is searchable and accessible by everyone – the general public, the law enforcement community, and the missing persons' clearinghouse coordinators across the nation. Anyone can access the NamUs system to search or track cases, print missing persons posters, find resources, and even map out travel routes in an effort to locate a missing person.

In July 2009, the third phase of the NamUs System, cross-matching, became active. The system now automatically searches for similarities between the unidentified decedent cases and the missing persons cases every time a new case is published to the system or whenever a case is opened. It alerts NamUs case managers when potential matches are found so they can follow-up.

In just a short period of time, NamUs has become a valuable tool for law enforcement and medical examiners. All 50 states have missing person case reports in the NamUs system. Law enforcement officers in 50 states are registered and using NamUs, while medical examiners in 48 states, D.C., and Puerto Rico are using the system.

In May 2009, NamUs was honored by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) with an Excellence in Technology Award, which recognizes law enforcement agencies' superior achievement and innovation in the field of communication and information technology. In July 2009, the NamUs video won an Apex Award (sponsored by the editors of *Writing That Works*, a newsletter for communicators who write, edit, and manage business publications) in the category of "Special Purpose Electronic & Video Publications."

Much more important than any award, however, is the difference NamUs has made in people's lives. In 2009, NamUS was used to identify the remains of a man recently found dead as those of a boy reported missing in Virginia in 1995. Also in 2009, a citizen reviewing NamUs noticed similar information in the missing persons report and in the unidentified decedent data sets of the system of a recently found body. He contacted the authorities and the man was identified as an alleged victim of homicide.

Another example is a man who disappeared in Connecticut in April 2009. His aunt entered information about him in NamUs. The following month a body was found, and using the information entered by the aunt, the body was identified as the man who disappeared in April. While the information

uncovered by NamUs unfortunately confirmed deaths, it provided much needed resolution to the victims' families and friends.

While we are very proud of what NamUs has accomplished, we are also constantly striving to make it better. That is why we enthusiastically support "Billy's Law." This legislation would specifically authorize NamUs. It would also encourage and facilitate the sharing of information from disparate systems critical to the resolution of missing persons and unidentified decedent cases. In addition, the bill would lead to substantial improvements in how information is shared between NamUs and the National Crime Information Center's (NCIC) Missing Person File and Unidentified Decedent File, which is administered by CJIS.

"Billy's Law" would authorize grants for personnel, technology, and training to help states submit data to NCIC and NamUs. We are hopeful that, should this program receive appropriations, it would provide a strong incentive for states to provide critical information to NCIC and NamUs shortly after a case is reported.

We do have a couple of suggestions concerning how this bill could be strengthened, which are outlined in the Department's views letter on H.R. 3695.

Please be assured that the Department will continue to expand and improve its efforts to help law enforcement, medical professionals, and the general public find missing persons and identify unidentified human remains. This has always been a critical part of OJP's mission, and it will remain so. We look forward to working with the Subcommittee on "Billy's Law."

This concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you or Members of the Subcommittee may have.