



Press Office: 202-226-0853

Tuesday, July 15, 2014

**Rep. Dave Loebsack (D-IA) Opening Statement for Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee Hearing, “*Protecting America’s Youth: An Update from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.*”**

I thank the Chair for convening today’s important oversight hearing, and thank Mr. Ryan for joining us today to provide an update on the activities of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

As a father and a grandfather, I cannot fathom the terror experienced by the parents of a missing child.

Parents in the midst of this trauma need the full support of law enforcement, schools, and other programs designed to locate and recover missing or exploited children.

That is where the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children comes in.

Since its creation in 1984 through the Missing Children’s Assistance Act, this private, non-profit organization has provided assistance, outreach and support to missing and exploited children and their families.

NCMEC is tasked with coordinating federal efforts to locate, recover or reunite missing children with families, as well as efforts to reduce and end child sexual exploitation and trafficking.

Founded in response to several high profile child abductions, the Center works directly with law enforcement to rapidly respond to the approximately ten to thirteen thousand missing children reports they receive each year.

NCMEC is also a partner in the Amber Alert program, the nation’s child abduction alert system. Named for Amber Hagerman, a 9-year old abducted and murdered in Arlington, Texas in 1996, the alerts are distributed widely via radio, television, e-mail, text message and highway traffic signs.

As of this May, 692 children have been successfully recovered as a result of Amber Alerts. Just last week, three missing girls in Iowa were recovered thanks to a swiftly dispatched Amber Alert.

Further, NCMEC offers training and technical assistance to law enforcement in identifying sex offenders, provides guidance and information to community partners on how to effectively locate and identify missing children, and operates a tip line for reporting missing children.

In recent years, the Center has seen its workload relating to cases of sexual exploitation of children increase dramatically. In fact, the number of complaints of child sex trafficking increased 1000 percent from 2004 to 2008.

Additionally, the Internet has increased the risk of youth exploitation and Internet crimes against children and child pornography cases continue to rise.

Last September, Congress reauthorized the Missing Children's Assistance Act and updated the role of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to reflect this evolving landscape.

One of the most important provisions of this reauthorization was the addition of a requirement that NCMEC coordinate with the Interagency Council on Homelessness in order to address the high number of homeless youth who are victims of sex trafficking.

Runaway and homeless youth are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and trafficking. Last year, one in seven endangered runaways reported to NCMEC were likely sex trafficking victims.

Many of these youth were in the care of social services or foster care when they ran and may have experienced sexual abuse before they left their homes.

These children are at an increased risk of falling victim to sexual exploitation or engage in "survival sex" in exchange for food, shelter or money.

I'm eager to get an update on how NCMEC is coordinating with services for homeless and runaway youth to prevent children from ending up in these devastating circumstances.

I also recognize that there is still more we must do to prevent children from becoming victims.

Despite the best effort of NCMEC, more than 10,000 kids still go missing each year and scores of children are forced into sexual exploitation and trafficking.

I look forward to hearing from Mr. Ryan on what federal supports he needs to change this.

It is also important to note that the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act is up for reauthorization this year, but at this point there has been no movement in this committee to do so.

This law complements the Missing Children's Assistance by providing targeted assistance to homeless youth through initiatives like the Basic Center Program, which provides youth with emergency shelter, food, clothing, and medical care.

By reducing the number of runaway and homeless kids in the streets with nowhere to go, we can lower the risk of exploited children.

As we move forward, it is critical that we provide the National Center for Missed and Exploited Children with all of the resources it needs to carry out its mission, including adequate funding.

I look forward to hearing from you, Mr. Ryan.

###

[Committee on Education and the Workforce Democrats](#)