

Testimony

of

Jim Cole

before

the

US House of Representatives
House Judiciary Committee

March 6, 2024
10:00am

Good morning, Chairman Jordan, Ranking Member Nadler, Chairman Biggs, Ranking Member Jackson Lee, and honorable members of the committee. My name is Jim Cole, and I stand before you today as a retired Supervisory Special Agent from Homeland Security Investigations, Chair Emeritus of the INTERPOL Specialists Group on Crimes Against Children, Founding Partner of Onemi-Global Solutions and also as the Chief of Law Enforcement Enterprise & Technology at Operation Light Shine.

I extend my gratitude to Tim for his compelling introduction and his unwavering commitment to protecting our most vulnerable population, our children. Unlike some who seek the spotlight only momentarily, Tim stands apart as authentically committed. As I have gotten to know Tim over the past few years, I've seen firsthand his genuine dedication. Tim is the real deal and puts his money where his mouth is both literally and figuratively. The Tim Tebow Foundation has been an indispensable ally in the fight against child sexual exploitation since I had the opportunity to share with Tim the horrors of child sexual exploitation.

I spent my 20-year career at HSI on the forefront of combating child sexual exploitation, an endeavor that has become my life's mission. In 2004 a case came into our office that would change the course of my life and my career. It is the catalyst for why I am here today. At its height over 12,000 abuse images and videos depicting the victim were being submitted to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's Cybertipline and Child Victim Identification Program. Now, 20 years later, Law Enforcement around the globe are still encountering these images and videos in their investigations. I am still in close contact with the survivor of this horrendous case, and I am incredibly grateful to inform you that she is doing very well and is about to complete her PhD to become a clinical psychologist.

Her case was a watershed moment for me, inspiring a new approach focused on victim rescue rather than solely arresting CSAM distributors. This methodology, known as Victim Identification, emphasizes uncovering new material hidden within the vast arrays of seized content, shifting the priority to finding and aiding victims.

I was recruited to establish the Victim Identification Program and Laboratory at HSI's Cyber Crimes Center. Some of you and your staff recently visited that very lab and saw firsthand the incredible work that goes on in it. It is one of my proudest legacies. Starting off in a closet, I was challenged with demonstrating the effectiveness of the techniques and methodologies to secure budget and support. Within six months, through intense analysis of unknown, unidentified CSAM depicting the horrific rape of extremely young children I was able to identify and facilitate the rescue of 32 child victims.

One notable case that garnered national media attention was Operation Sunflower. After several images depicting the exploitation of a young girl were shared on a Darknet child exploitation site and found by a Danish victim identification specialist we began an urgent effort to identify and safeguard her. An image shared on a Darknet site depicted the young victim in the backseat of a car, with a blurry highway sign through the window. This sign, we determined, was in Kansas, starting with a "2" and stretching east to west. Distinct features were depicted, including a round hay bale, a hedgerow, and a tree near the sign. With this information, we set out across Kansas, driving down every highway starting with "2" and running east to west.

On the second day of the search, while driving down Highway 20, the specific sign we were searching for came into focus near the highway's end. As we got closer, I could see it aligned perfectly with the image: the hay bale, hedgerow, tree, and sign were all there. This precise match expedited the 11-year-old victim's identification and rescue that very day. From the discovery of the CSAM on the Darknet to the child's rescue, only 13 days elapsed.

During my seven years running the program and lab, I had four personnel conducting Victim Identification. It's not near enough personnel for this task. As Tim stated earlier, there are tens of thousands of unsolved series, unidentified victims out there who are waiting on us to safeguard them.

There is already an incredible and successful blueprint to increase victim identification personnel within HSI and support our nation's military veterans. We need to look no further than the HSI HERO Corps program to see the path forward. Time constraints prevent a detailed briefing, but I've submitted a document laying out a viable strategy for consideration.

Victim Identification requires global collaboration. Every case I worked in my 20 years had a global nexus. Offenders do not care about lines on a map. The horrific rape of a three-year-old girl is memorialized on video by her own father, and in minutes is uploaded to a file share site and then linked in a post on a Darknet child exploitation site with over a million members. In under an hour that child's worst moments are downloaded by thousands of offenders around the globe. In 24 hours that number is tens of thousands.

INTERPOL plays a vital role in victim identification through the International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) Database. This platform unites victim identification experts from over 68 countries in a secure, collaborative portal, enabling real-time collaborative analysis of unidentified CSAM. By facilitating video and image comparisons, ICSE streamlines the identification process, connecting victims, abusers, and locations. It prevents duplicative efforts and accelerates investigations by informing users about previously identified series or similarities with other images. This global collaboration is crucial for swiftly identifying and rescuing victims. However, the system requires updates to enhance its effectiveness.

Shortly, you will hear from my colleague and friend John Madsen who will address resource constraints in combating child exploitation. I'd like to briefly contribute to this topic. After retiring from HSI in March, I joined Operation Light Shine (OLS), a non-profit working with Tim and The Tim Tebow Foundation. At OLS, we empower law enforcement with necessary funds, resources, technology, and training to fight CSAM and human trafficking via our INTERCEPT Task Forces. We secure private funding to equip local and state agencies with essentials like detective salaries, vehicles, and forensic tools—resources they desperately need but lack federal funding for. The mission of OLS underscores the glaring shortfall in federal support for this crucial battle.

The proposed funding for the creation of Victim Identification Specialist positions within HSI represents a critical investment in the nation's efforts to combat child sexual exploitation. By leveraging the skills and dedication of our veterans and equipping them with the tools and

training they need, Congress can significantly enhance our ability to protect children from exploitation and abuse. We urge Congress to support this vital initiative, which will not only aid in the fight against CSE but also provide meaningful career opportunities for those who have served our country.

Supporting Information from Jim Cole for House Judiciary Committee

Expansion of Homeland Security Investigations through Victim Identification Specialists

March 6, 2024

Executive Summary

Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) plays a pivotal role in combating child sexual exploitation (CSE) and rescuing victims from unthinkable abuse. To significantly enhance HSI and the United States capabilities in this critical area, we propose the creation and funding of specialized positions titled "Victim Identification Specialists." These positions are designed to focus intensively on identifying victims of child sexual exploitation. Building on the successful framework of the HSI HERO (Human Exploitation Rescue Operative) program, which recruits service-disabled veterans, we propose expanding eligibility to all honorably discharged veterans. This initiative will not only provide veterans with meaningful employment opportunities but also significantly enhance the nation's capacity to combat child sexual exploitation.

The Need for Victim Identification Specialists

Child sexual exploitation is an evolving threat, with offenders constantly adopting new technologies and methods to exploit vulnerable victims and evade detection. This demands a robust and specialized response, underlining the critical need for Victim Identification Specialists within Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). Currently, there is a small group (less than ten) focused on Victim Identification at HSI, all assigned to the HSI Cyber Crimes Center. It is essential to expand this force. The introduction of Victim Identification Specialists into HSI field offices across the nation, with a central coordinating unit at the HSI Cyber Crimes Center, would ensure a pervasive and unified approach to combating CSE. This expansion is crucial not only for enhancing the scope and efficiency of investigations but also for fostering a more proactive and preemptive stance against exploitation. By increasing the number of specialists, we can ensure wider coverage, faster response times, and a more significant impact against the scourge of child exploitation, ultimately safeguarding more lives and securing justice for victims.

Training and Development Pipeline

To effectively combat the growing threat of child sexual exploitation (CSE), the introduction of a structured and rigorous training pipeline for Victim Identification Specialists is imperative. This pipeline mirrors the successful framework of the HSI HERO program, tailored specifically for digital forensic examiners, and is designed to equip new specialists with the skills and knowledge required to identify and rescue victims, apprehend perpetrators, and locate crime scenes involved in CSE.

Initial Training Phase

The journey begins with an intensive HSI Child Exploitation course, which lays the foundational understanding of the dynamics of child exploitation, the legal framework surrounding it, and the role of technology in facilitating these crimes. Following this, candidates undergo specialized training in Victim Identification, which focuses on the nuances of identifying victims from digital evidence, multimedia file processing and analysis, understanding the psychological aspects of victim behavior, and the use of technology in identifying victims and offenders. A foundational

course in digital forensics further empowers these specialists, providing them with the technical acumen to analyze digital evidence and multimedia files, understand, and utilize digital forensic tools effectively. Throughout the training pipeline the utmost care will be taken to train and provide the candidates with skills to cope and manage the unique stresses of working with child sexual exploitation material and data. A close integration with the HSI Armor mental welfare program and access to clinicians will be an integral part of the program.

On-the-Job Training

After completing the initial coursework, candidates transition to a 10-month on-the-job training period at an HSI Field Office. This phase is crucial for applying theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios, under the mentorship of experienced CSE agents and Victim Identification Specialists who are part of the HSI Victim Identification Program and Laboratory. During this period, trainees are exposed to active investigations, participate in the digital forensic examination of evidence, and assist in the identification and rescue of victims. This hands-on experience is invaluable, allowing candidates to hone their skills, understand the intricacies of fieldwork, and learn to navigate the challenges of complex investigations.

Finalization and Deployment

Upon successful completion of the on-the-job training, candidates are evaluated for their proficiency, decision-making capabilities, and overall performance. Those who meet the rigorous standards set forth by HSI are offered a permanent position as a Victim Identification Specialist (1801), ready to take their place in the front lines against child exploitation. As fully-fledged specialists, they are deployed across the network of HSI field offices, significantly enhancing the agency's capacity to combat CSE with highly trained, specialized personnel.

Continuous Learning and Mentorship

The training pipeline doesn't end with deployment. Victim Identification Specialists are encouraged to engage in continuous learning, keeping abreast of the latest technological advancements and evolving tactics used by offenders. Ongoing mentorship and advanced training opportunities ensure that these specialists remain at the cutting edge of digital forensics and victim identification techniques, ready to adapt to and counter the dynamic threats faced in the field of child exploitation.

This structured and comprehensive training pipeline is essential for developing a robust cadre of Victim Identification Specialists, equipped with the expertise and practical experience to significantly impact the fight against child sexual exploitation.

Responsibilities and Capabilities

Victim Identification Specialists (VIS) are crucial to the collaborative effort in combating Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM), working alongside digital forensic examiners and special agents to identify and rescue child victims, apprehend offenders, and locate crime scenes. VIS bring their technical expertise and creative investigative skills facilitate the overall investigation with a focus on the identification of victims, offenders and locations then providing special agents with the information who then execute rescue and enforcement actions. VIS contribute significantly to

dismantling abuse networks and safeguarding victims. This teamwork underscores the multidisciplinary approach essential for the successful resolution of CSAM cases, highlighting the synergistic blend of skills and authorities within the team to achieve common objectives.

VIS Roles and Responsibilities

1. Comprehensive Multimedia Analysis

Victim Identification Specialists (VIS) undertake a thorough multimedia analysis as their primary role, applying advanced digital forensic techniques to Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM). This analysis is comprehensive, encompassing the identification of victims, offenders, and the locations where crimes occurred. VIS utilize a blend of technical skills and creative problem-solving to decode visual and audio cues, background elements, and metadata within digital content. This role requires a keen eye for detail and the ability to interpret indirect clues—such as regional landmarks, household items, or background noises—that could reveal crucial information about the individuals involved and where the abuse took place. The aim is to construct detailed digital profiles for victims and offenders and pinpoint crime scene locations, which are essential for the subsequent rescue, apprehension, and investigative efforts.

2. Collaboration

A key aspect of the work done by VIS involves extensive collaboration with a broad spectrum of entities, both within and outside their immediate law enforcement environment. Internally, they work alongside digital forensic examiners, criminal intelligence analysts, and special agents/case agents, forming a cohesive unit that shares insights, data, and strategic plans to advance investigations. Externally, VIS engage with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), INTERPOL's Crimes Against Children Team, global and U.S. law enforcement agencies, United States Attorney's Offices, and EUROPOL. This collaborative network is vital for sharing intelligence, leveraging resources, and coordinating efforts across jurisdictions to ensure a unified and effective response to incidents of child exploitation.

3. Advancement of Investigative Techniques

Victim Identification Specialists are also at the forefront of advancing investigative techniques within the realm of CSAM investigations. They are responsible for staying abreast of the latest technological developments and forensic methodologies that can enhance the identification and analysis process. This includes exploring new software and tools for digital forensics, developing innovative approaches to data analysis, and refining strategies for online investigations. Their role in pushing the boundaries of how technology can be used to combat child exploitation is crucial for maintaining a proactive stance against offenders and adapting to the evolving digital landscape.

4. Training and Knowledge Sharing

Another critical responsibility for VIS is the ongoing training and knowledge sharing with peers and partner organizations. They contribute to the development of training programs, workshops, and seminars aimed at educating law enforcement personnel on the nuances of CSAM investigations. By disseminating their specialized knowledge and expertise, VIS play a pivotal role in enhancing the collective capability of law enforcement to address and combat child sexual exploitation. This

includes mentoring new specialists, providing expert guidance in cross-disciplinary teams, and sharing insights on best practices and lessons learned from past investigations.

Collaboration and Impact

The role of VIS extends beyond individual case work; they contribute to a global effort against child exploitation by sharing insights, data, and best practices with international partners, including INTERPOL and other law enforcement agencies. Their work not only aids in immediate victim rescue and offender capture but also contributes to the larger goal of preventing future abuse and exploitation.

In summary, Victim Identification Specialists are at the heart of a critical mission to combat child sexual exploitation. Through their specialized skills, dedication to continuous improvement, and collaborative approach, they provide hope and deliver justice for the most vulnerable victims of these crimes.

Required Resources

To fulfill these responsibilities effectively, Victim Identification Specialists will require:

- Advanced technological tools for the deep processing and analysis of digital media.
- Continuous training in cutting-edge digital forensics and investigative techniques.
- Support for ongoing collaboration with international partners and access to the INTERPOL ICSE Database.

Impact and Benefits

The addition of Victim Identification Specialists to HSI will:

- Enhance the ability to identify and rescue victims of child sexual exploitation.
- Improve the identification and apprehension of offenders.
- Increase the identification and analysis of crime scenes.
- Provide valuable employment opportunities for veterans, utilizing their unique skills and dedication to protect the nation's most vulnerable.

Conclusion

The proposed funding for the creation of Victim Identification Specialist positions within HSI represents a critical investment in the nation's efforts to combat child sexual exploitation. By leveraging the skills and dedication of our veterans and equipping them with the tools and training they need, Congress can significantly enhance our ability to protect children from exploitation and abuse. We urge Congress to support this vital initiative, which will not only aid in the fight against CSE but also provide meaningful career opportunities for those who have served our country.

Supporting Information from Jim Cole for House Judiciary Committee

Funding for the INTERPOL Next Generation International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) System

March 6, 2024

Executive Summary

The International Child Sexual Exploitation (ICSE) database plays a pivotal role in identifying victims of child sexual abuse worldwide by facilitating the analysis and sharing of images and videos among international law enforcement agencies. Despite its success, the evolving nature of technology and the increasing volume of digital content necessitate significant upgrades to the system. The proposed Next Generation ICSE seeks to introduce a "plug and play" framework that allows for seamless integration of new technologies, ensuring the system remains at the forefront of victim identification efforts.

Background

The current ICSE database has been instrumental in connecting victims, abusers, and crime scenes, leading to the identification of over 37,900 victims globally. However, the rapid advancement of digital technologies and the increasing sophistication of criminal networks require an agile and technologically advanced response mechanism.

Proposal for Next Generation ICSE

The Next Generation ICSE envisions a comprehensive overhaul of the existing system, introducing a flexible architecture that can quickly adapt to and incorporate new technological developments. Key features include:

- Enhanced image and video analysis tools using artificial intelligence and machine learning for quicker and more accurate victim identification.
- Improved data sharing protocols to facilitate real-time collaboration among international partners.
- Advanced cybersecurity measures to protect sensitive data from unauthorized access and cyber threats.

Benefits:

- **Increased Efficiency:** Faster victim identification can significantly reduce investigation times, enabling quicker intervention and support for victims.
- **Scalability:** A modular system ensures that new technologies can be integrated without overhauling the entire infrastructure, offering cost-effective scalability.
- **Global Impact:** Strengthening the ICSE database reinforces international cooperation in the fight against child sexual exploitation, contributing to a safer environment for children worldwide.

Conclusion

Investing in the Next Generation ICSE is an investment in the safety and well-being of children around the world. By leveraging cutting-edge technology, we can enhance our ability to identify and protect victims of sexual exploitation, ensuring that law enforcement agencies are always one step ahead of perpetrators. Congressional support and funding are imperative to realize this vision and continue the global fight against child sexual exploitation.