

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 25, 2019

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Chairwoman, House Committee on
Appropriations
Capitol Building H-307
Washington, DC, 20515

The Honorable Kay Granger
Ranking Member, House Committee on
Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC, 20515

The Honorable José Serrano
Chairman, Subcommittee on Commerce,
Justice, and Science
Capitol Building H-310
Washington, DC, 20515

The Honorable Robert Aderholt
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Commerce,
Justice, and Science
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC, 20515

Dear Chairwoman Lowey, Ranking Member Granger, Chairman Serrano, and Ranking Member Aderholt,

Thank you for your continued support of law enforcement in the appropriations process and for your efforts to increase funding this year above the budget request for Missing and Exploited Children programs at the Department of Justice ("DOJ"). As you begin the process of negotiating a final FY20 number with the Senate, we ask you to address the growing epidemic of online child exploitation.

While abuse has risen over the past decade, federal funding to combat this issue has remained practically flat. We are grateful for the Committee's leadership the last several years to increase funding in this area. Nevertheless, this crisis is at a breaking point. Understanding the budget constraints the Committee on Appropriations faces on an annual basis, we request the Committee reaffirm Congress's commitment to combatting child exploitation as a law enforcement priority by increasing funding for Missing and Exploited Children programs beyond the \$85 million allocated in H.R. 3055.

A recent investigative report published by The New York Times last month detailed the ways in which the federal government has failed to address the epidemic of child exploitation online, specifically by failing to fully fund law enforcement initiatives to combat this problem.¹ The article discussed the overwhelming prevalence of horrific child exploitation images on the internet, finding that technology companies had reported 45 million images and videos depicting abuse over the past year. Additionally, the report highlighted that law enforcement agencies have reported being understaffed and underfunded even as they are seeing significant increases in incoming tips. Evolving technologies have provided new tools to shield predators such as encryption techniques and anonymous platforms like the dark web. It is essential that local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies who tackle these difficult issues have access to the most current and updated technology in order to most efficiently combat this overwhelming problem and the staffing resources to address the rising threats of exploitation.

¹ Dance, Gabriel J.X. and Heller, Michael H. "The Internet Is Overrun with Images of Child Sexual Abuse. What Went Wrong?" *The New York Times* 30 September 2019

While we appreciate the Committee's work to increase funding for Missing and Exploited Children programs, we believe more must be done. The 2017 re-authorization of the PROTECT Our Children Act authorized \$60 million to fund the ICAC Program. This program establishes law enforcement task forces located around the country that consist of local, state, and federal law enforcement tasked with the important work of developing effective responses to combat online exploitation of children. The ICAC program also provides critical funding for training and technical assistance to local law enforcement units who are often the front-line investigators in these cases. Facing mentally exhausting conditions and limited resources, these law enforcement officers need Congressional support. Dating back to fiscal year 2010, however, Congress has underfunded the ICAC program, appropriating around \$30 million annually – half of the amount authorized in the PROTECT Our Children Act. Due to the gravity of this situation, we urge the Committee to consider increasing funding for this vital program.

Additionally, we request the Committee address this problem holistically by increasing funding for the other important programs funded through the Missing and Exploited Children account, including both the AMBER Alert system and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. These programs play a crucial role in aiding law enforcement and protecting children. This reasonable adjustment could finally achieve full funding for the ICAC task force program under the PROTECT Our Children Act of 2008, while also increasing important resources for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Based on these needs, an increase in the allocation for the Missing and Exploited Children fund will help improve the federal response to online child exploitation.

Furthermore, we would like to encourage your engagement with DOJ to ensure the Department is proactive in including a robust plan and prioritization of these programs in next year's budget request to Congress. We look forward to working with the Committee to fund efforts that will protect the well-being of our country's youth, keep our families and communities safe, and hold criminals accountable. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Congressman Gonzalez's office at (202) 225-3876.

Sincerely,



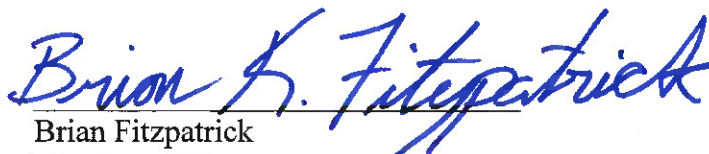
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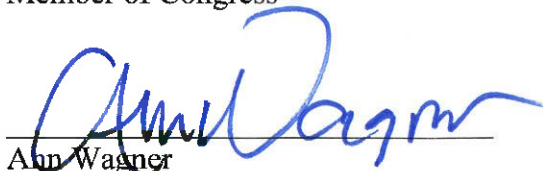
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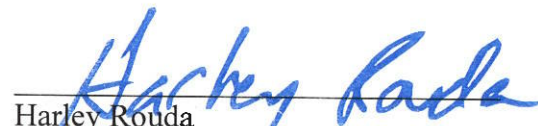



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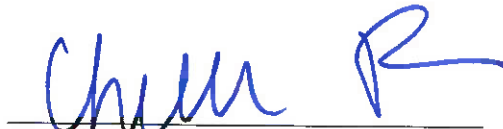
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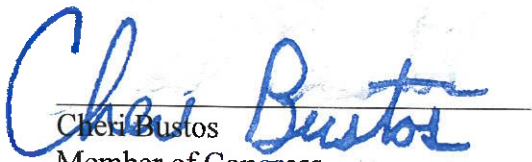

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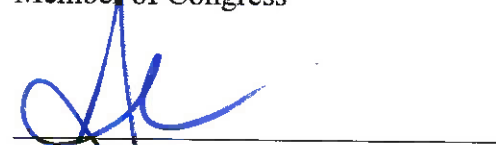

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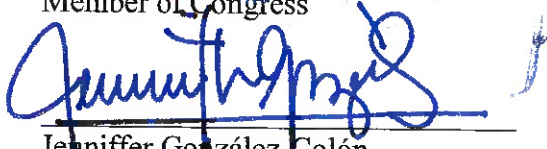

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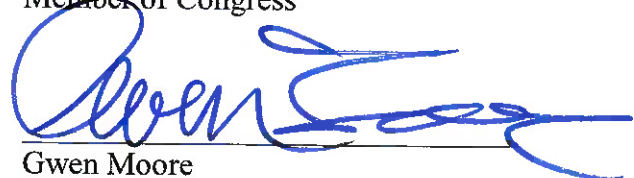

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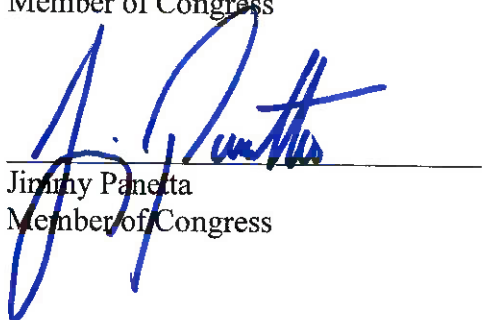

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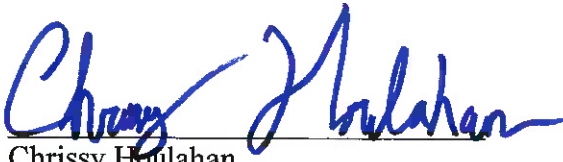

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