USING MODERN TOOLS TO COUNTER HUMAN TRAFFICKING

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CYBERSECURITY, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, AND GOVERNMENT INNOVATION

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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OPENING STATEMENTS

WITNESSES

Written opening statements and bios are available on the U.S. House of Representatives Document Repository at: docs.house.gov.

INDEX OF DOCUMENTS

* Article, *WYFF*, "2 Greenville Co. Men Charged in Human Trafficking Investigation Involving Minor, SLED says"; submitted by Rep. Mace.

* Article, *Live 5 News WCSC*, "4 Indicted in Charleston-Area Sex Trafficking Case; Search on for More Victims"; submitted by Rep. Mace.

* Article, *The Berkley Observer*, "Berkeley County Ranks No. 4 In SC For Human Trafficking Cases Report"; submitted by Rep. Mace.

* Article, *Your Island News*, "DSS, Runaway Beaufort Preteen Victim of Human Trafficking"; submitted by Rep. Mace.

* Article, *Live 5 News WCSC*, "Hanahan Husband, Wife Charged With Trafficking, Sexually Exploiting Girl"; submitted by Rep. Mace.

* Article, *WYFF*, "Juveniles Rescued From Human Trafficking, Immigration Arrests Made at SC Restaurant"; submitted by Rep. Mace.

* Article, *WBTV*, "Man Accused of Trafficking Teen in Rock Hill"; submitted by Rep. Mace.

* Article, *The State*, "Rep. Nancy Mace: Human Trafficking is Rising in South Carolina, Here's How We Fight it"; submitted by Rep. Mace.

* Article, *WRDW*, "S.C. Human Trafficking Shows 400% Increase in 2022, Report Says"; submitted by Rep. Mace.

* Article, *WYFF*, "South Carolina Women Accused of Trafficking Minors for Cleaning Service"; submitted by Rep. Mace.

* Letter, December 8, 2025, from John Vithoulkas, to Subcommittee; submitted by Rep. Mace.

* Press Release, U.S. Attorney's Office, District of South Carolina, "Beaufort Co. Men Charged with Child Sex Trafficking"; submitted by Rep. Mace.

* Article, *The Guardian*, "Trump Administration Retreats on Combatting Human Trafficking"; submitted by Rep. Subramanyam.

The documents listed above are available at: docs.house.gov.

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS

* Questions for the Record: Mr. Roy L. Austin Jr.; submitted by Rep. Yassamin Ansari.

* Questions for the Record: Ms. Cara Jones; submitted by Rep. Eli Crane.

* Questions for the Record: Ms. Melissa Snow; submitted by Rep. Eli Crane.

These documents were submitted after the hearing, and may be available upon request.

USING MODERN TOOLS TO COUNTER HUMAN TRAFFICKING

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2025

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on Subcommittee on Cybersecurity,
Information Technology, and Government Innovation
Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:37 p.m., in room 2247, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Nancy Mace [Chairwoman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Mace, Burlison, Brown, and Subramanyam.

Ms. MACE. The Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and Government Innovation will now come to order. And we welcome everyone.

Without objection, the Chair may declare a recess at any time.

And I will now recognize myself for the purpose of making an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN NANCY MACE
REPRESENTATIVE FROM SOUTH CAROLINA

Good afternoon. Thank you all for being here today for this important hearing on using technology to counter human trafficking. Human trafficking is not an abstract crime. It is happening right now, everywhere: on our phones, in our teenagers' pockets, on websites, you scroll past on social media without even thinking, and in the hotel rooms just off the interstates which run through all of our districts all across the country.

The average age a victim is first trafficked in the United States could be as low as 12 to 14 years old. Let that sink in. And you look at the Epstein victims, for example, they were 14, many of them.

While we are sitting here, children are being bought and sold online like commodities. These websites and communication platforms allow traffickers to operate in unimaginable ways.

But as this—as we are here today, technology also provides us with a huge opportunity to fight this terrible crime with 21st century tools. Artificial intelligence, data analytics, and digital forensics are no longer science fiction. They are recovering victims in hours instead of months, identifying networks once hidden in

(1)

plain sight and building courtroom-ready cases against predators who thought the internet made them untouchable.

But here is the hard truth. We are still fighting this fight with one hand tied behind our backs. Law enforcement is drowning in more than 20 million cyber tip line reports a year, while task forces are understaffed and underfunded and sometimes stuck using tools that were considered cutting edge 20 years ago.

Tech companies are generating mountains of raw data, requiring increased resources to sort through it all. And well-meaning initiatives with the best intentions have, in some cases, driven trafficking deeper into the dark corners of the internet, making it harder for our investigators to follow.

According to South Carolina's corrupt Attorney General, Alan Wilson, in the state of South Carolina, a position he has held for 16 years, human trafficking is up over 400 percent, and he is proud of it. It is obscene. It is disgusting. And, Alan, if you are listening or watching this right now, I have got it coming for you.

We can do better. We must do better. And I am hoping to learn from our witnesses today what is working, what is not, and most importantly, what Congress needs to do next. Because many in our states, like Attorney General Alan Wilson, are not doing anything. In fact, I just learned recently, Alan Wilson prosecuted zero pedophile cases last year in the State of South Carolina. Zero.

Are our current laws helping or hurting? Do we have the funding, the data-sharing authorities, and the public-private partnerships we need to turn good technology into rescued lives? And how do we make sure innovation outpaces the criminals who adapt overnight?

Congress has both the responsibility and the ability to remove bureaucratic roadblocks, fund proven solutions, and write smarter laws which actually protect the vulnerable, instead of just making us feel like we did something. There is no issue more urgent, and there is no excuse for inaction.

I look forward for the testimony today of our witnesses and to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to turn today's conversation into tomorrow's results. And I want to thank you.

I do want to request unanimous consent to enter some articles into the record. The first is in Beaufort County in my district. Men were charged with—Beaufort County Men Charged With Child Sex Trafficking, Coercion, Child Sexual Abuse Material Distribution in November, just a month ago, 2025.

The next article is on *Live 5 News 4*. Indicted. In my district in Charleston area, sex trafficking case and a search for more victims.

The next article also in my district, Hanahan husband and wife charged with trafficking and sexually exploiting a girl.

In Greenville County, South Carolina, two Greenville County men charged in human trafficking investigation involving minor, SLED says, on *WYFF*.

In Rock Hill, South Carolina, on *WBTV*, man accused of trafficking teen in Rock Hill.

On *WYFF*, from Horry County in Myrtle Beach, two women charged with human trafficking of minors, SLED says.

Homeland Security, juveniles rescued from human trafficking, immigration arrests made at a South Carolina restaurant in West Union, South Carolina, small town South Carolina.

South Carolina human trafficking shows 400 percent increase in 2022, according to reports in Columbia, South Carolina.

And the Berkeley County Observer, in my home county where I grew up, Berkeley County ranks number four—number four—in South Carolina for human trafficking cases.

And in the *Your Island News*, runaway Beaufort preteen victim of human trafficking, according to this report.

And, last, there was an op-ed that I wrote in July 2024 in the state newspaper. Human trafficking is rising in South Carolina, and here is how we fight it.

So, without objection, so ordered.

I will now recognize Member Brown for her opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SHONTEL BROWN

REPRESENTATIVE FROM OHIO

Ms. BROWN. Thank you, Chairwoman Mace, for calling this Subcommittee hearing.

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss how technology can help law enforcement better detect, investigate, and prosecute cases of human trafficking. Human trafficking can look like kidnapping or physical force, but most human traffickers rely on means, such as fraud, manipulation, or threats, to force those they are trafficking into performing sex work or labor.

As of January 2025, it is estimated that over 27 million people around the world were subject to human trafficking. While people of all ages and genders are trafficked, predators usually target vulnerable individuals and communities. This includes children in foster care, immigrants, and individuals facing addiction, trauma, or abuse. So, strengthening our social safety net and looking at underlying causes is critical to any comprehensive effort to address human trafficking.

Technology can also play an important role with so much of this illicit activity taking place on the internet. For example, artificial intelligence and other technology solutions can enhance our ability to track and trace human trafficking by targeting the very websites and online resources that traffickers use to profit from the misery of others. But even with these solutions, it is important that we keep survivors and their experience and stories at the center of our efforts to combat trafficking.

Technology alone will not end human trafficking, and survivors offer knowledge and lived experience that no algorithm can provide. Survivors know what predators say, how they act, what kinds of interventions create a safe environment without amplifying harm. I look forward to hearing today about ways that responsible use of technology can strengthen solutions that truly support survivors.

So, yes, fighting human trafficking requires technology and resources, but it also requires law enforcement officers skilled at investigating, intercepting, and prosecuting traffickers. Yet, what has this Administration done? Well, it has spent this year diverting re-

sources away from efforts to combat human trafficking both in the United States and abroad.

For example, Homeland Security agents who previously worked on human trafficking have been redeployed to supporting the President's cruel and reckless immigration agenda. That means experts on transnational crime are no longer spending their time cracking down on human trafficking rings. They are, instead, patrolling the streets with ICE to check the papers and harass nonviolent immigrants.

The backwardness does not end there. The Administration also abandoned the United States' role as a global leader in the fight against trafficking. In July, President Trump gutted the State's Department office to monitor and combat trafficking in persons which has spent the past 25 years—25 years—working to combat human sex and labor trafficking around the world. So, not only is the Trump Administration making it harder to catch traffickers, but they are also making it easier for traffickers to find and exploit victims.

Flooding the streets with masked armed men who refuse to identify themselves is incredibly dangerous and cowardly. The FBI has even issued a warning to State and Federal law enforcement agencies that criminals impersonating ICE agents have carried out robberies, kidnappings, and sexual assaults.

Under the Trump immigration crackdown, immigrants of all sorts, including people in this country legally, have become afraid of law enforcement. People now have to confront the question of whether they will be harassed or even deported or detained simply for reporting crimes like human trafficking to law enforcement. So, ICE's masked squads pulling people off the street at random have created the kind of fear that allows traffickers to thrive. Witnesses and survivors are less likely to come forward.

While I welcome this conversation on how technology can help to counter human trafficking, I am severely, severely concerned the Administration is focused on the wrong things and even making the situation worse.

Effectively, preventing human trafficking requires changing the root systems that leave many people vulnerable and enable traffickers. It means prioritizing resources to investigate and catch traffickers at home and abroad and expect trafficking to magically stop. Taking away law enforcement manpower and scaring people who are already vulnerable to trafficking out of reporting suspicious activities just gives traffickers more opportunities and more prey.

So, I want to just say thank you to the witnesses who are here, and I look forward to this discussion about your critically important work.

And with that, I yield back, Madam Chair.

Ms. MACE. Thank you.

I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a letter from John Vithoulkas, County Manager of Henrico County, Virginia, which thanks us for holding this hearing today and offers solutions for our consideration.

So, without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. MACE. I am pleased today to introduce our witnesses for today's hearing. Our first witness today is Ms. Megan Lundstrom, Chief Executive Officer of Polaris. Our second witness is Ms. Melissa Snow, Executive Director at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. Our third witness is Ms. Cara Jones, Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Marinus Analytics. And our fourth witness today is Mr. Roy Austin, Director of the Artificial Intelligence Initiative at Howard University.

Welcome everyone, and we are pleased to have you this afternoon. Pursuant to Committee Rule 9(g), the witnesses will please stand and raise your right hands. This is where we make it official.

Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony that you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

And let the record show that the witnesses all answered in the affirmative. You can sit down now.

We appreciate all of you being here today and look forward to your testimony. I just want to remind the witnesses here that we have read your written statements and they will appear in full in the hearing record. Please limit your oral statements to 5 minutes this afternoon.

As a reminder, please press the button on the microphone in front of you so that we may hear you. And when you begin to speak, the light in front of you will turn green. After 4 minutes, it will turn yellow. And when the red light comes on, your 5 minutes has expired, and we will ask that you please wrap it up.

So, I will now recognize Ms. Lundstrom for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF MS. MEGAN LUNDSTROM

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, POLARIS

Ms. LUNDSTROM. Thank you, Chairwoman Mace and Ranking Member Brown and Members of the Subcommittee.

Before I ever led an organization or did work around data and technology, I was a young, single mother fleeing a domestic violence situation, and I ran straight into the arms of a trafficker. What was done to me is, unfortunately, not unique.

Over the five years of my own exploitation and over a decade of anti-trafficking work since then, I can say with certainty that technology does not change traffickers' motives. It changes their methods.

What I would like to do today is map the journey of a survivor from vulnerability, to exploitation, to freedom, and show how technology can either recreate the dynamics of trafficking or help end them.

Trafficking begins with an unmet need: a job, family, belonging. Traffickers meet those needs when no one else is willing to. A decade ago, traffickers found people like me at gas stations and bus stops. They exploited us through hotels, prepaid gift cards, and burner phones.

Today, it is algorithmic targeting, apps, and digital wallets. Where traffickers find us and sell us has evolved because technology has evolved. But why they target us and exploit us remains the same.

Ethical technology has enormous potential to combat human trafficking. With survivor input, from day one, Polaris built a causal AI model that identifies structural drivers of trafficking. It shows, for example, that in the United States, child poverty is one of the strongest predictors of vulnerability to trafficking.

This tool allows policymakers like you to test how interventions like childcare tax credits for working families could reduce the risk before exploitation ever occurs. We can use technology to change the conditions that traffickers prey on.

As exploitation deepens, the promises fall apart and isolation grows. Technology is often used as a part of the control. Over the last 15 years, I have listened to survivors describe GPS tracking, nonstop messages, online ads they never consented to, digital payment accounts in their name they never knew about, and nonconsensual images used to threaten and punish them.

You see, traffickers sell the most vulnerable parts of us to line their own pockets. Every line of data is a person's story of vulnerability. If we use data in ways that ignore consent, if we share it, store it, analyze it, or profit from it without guardrails, we mirror that same dynamic. If we treat those sorts of data—survivors' stories—as a commodity, we are no better than the traffickers who scripted the story in the first place. This is why all technology must be rooted in three principles.

First, centering survivor autonomy. No technology should be used on survivors without informed consent. Second, protecting privacy through strong governance. Collect sparingly, store securely, use only for legitimate anti-trafficking purposes. And, third, pairing innovation with human expertise. Trafficking is too complex to hand over entirely to algorithms. It requires judgment, context, and ongoing input from people with lived experience.

Escaping exploitation is not the end. We do not get to just skip off into the sunset happily ever after to live our lives. Most survivors are trying to rebuild with fewer resources than we began with. Coerced debt, criminal records for acts we were forced to commit, ongoing digital abuse and harassment.

Technology has the potential to empower survivors in another way as well. Survivors need a seat at the table from the beginning, not only so our insights shape safer tools, but because a good-paying job is a critical part of justice. True freedom from trafficking comes when those unmet needs are safely and sustainably met.

Traffickers are opportunists. They will always adopt new technology faster than systems with compliance obligations. Our national response must be nimble to keep up, but never at the expense of the people we aim to protect. Technology should never be used on survivors. It should be used with and for us.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

Ms. MACE. Thank you.

I will now recognize Ms. Snow for 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF MS. MELISSA SNOW
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL CENTER FOR
MISSING & EXPLOITED CHILDREN**

Ms. SNOW. Good afternoon, Chairwoman Mace, Ranking Member Brown, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Melissa Snow, and I am the Executive Director of Child Sex Trafficking Programs at the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. NCMEC is a nonprofit organization created in 1984 by child advocates to help find missing children, reduce child sexual exploitation, and prevent child victimization. I am honored to be here today to share NCMEC's perspective on modern tools to combat human trafficking.

As part of its mission, NCMEC responds to reports of child sex trafficking, employs crucial analytical tools to identify and locate missing children trafficked for sex, trains law enforcement and child welfare on child sex trafficking issues, and provides very important recovery services support. To date, NCMEC has responded to over 280,000 reports relating to child sex trafficking.

Child sex trafficking occurs when a child under 18 is advertised, solicited, or exploited through a commercial sex act. The commercial exchange can include money, food, shelter, drugs, or anything of value.

NCMEC has seen every type of trafficking, including familial and nonfamilial trafficking, and trafficking that occurs when a child runs from home or child welfare care and exploited by traffickers and buyers. Behind every trafficking report submitted to NCMEC is a child demonstrating incredible resilience while facing unimaginable harm.

Child sex trafficking is a technology-facilitated crime that occurs on the clear web. The internet provides unregulated and anonymous spaces where traffickers and buyers can engage with children in ways that would never be acceptable offline. Children are often approached first and groomed by offenders on gaming platforms and social media platforms. Traffickers and buyers also use publicly available online escort and dating websites, as well as social media, to advertise, sell, and purchase children for sex.

Yet, technology is also crucial to NCMEC's efforts to support law enforcement in locating and recovering victims of child sex trafficking. NCMEC's child sex trafficking team leverages technology to more quickly and efficiently identify victims and remove them from exploitation.

We also use publicly available data tools, emerging technologies incorporating artificial intelligence, image matching, and sophisticated mapping techniques. For years, this technology has been generously donated by companies to support our mission.

For decades, NCMEC has been sounding the alarm about the pervasiveness of child sex trafficking online. However, it was not until the passage of the REPORT Act last year that online platforms were finally required to report child sex trafficking to NCMEC. As a result, the magnitude of online child sex trafficking became even more visible.

In the first six months of this year, after the REPORT Act became effective, child sex trafficking reports to NCMEC increased an astonishing 952 percent. As the volume and complexity of child

sex trafficking reports continue to increase, NCMEC relies on technology to support our efforts by connecting crucial and nuanced data points, surfacing connections between children and offenders, and automating the review and flagging of child sex trafficking indicators within missing child reports and reports made by online platforms and the public.

Every day we use donated specialized anti-trafficking tools, such as Traffic Jam and Spotlight, to search missing child data and photos against online escort ads. Another specific anti-trafficking tool, TraffickCam, allows NCMEC to use a search feature to identify hotel rooms where child sex trafficking victims had been photographed.

Using these innovative tools is lifesaving when we can connect a missing child to an active online escort ad advertising a child for sale in a specific city, and it is even more powerful when we can narrow it to a specific hotel. Being able to pass along a lead that is actionable for law enforcement can mean significantly reducing the amount of time that child is experiencing a nightmare.

Child sex trafficking is a complicated crime, and as the volume and complexity of these cases increase, the need for technology tools to protect and recover child victims will continue to escalate. It is crucial that smaller providers of anti-trafficking technology continue to have adequate resources to sustain, expand, and update their products, and equally important that larger tech companies devote more resources to developing and sharing large-scale anti-trafficking technology solutions.

Thank you for allowing NCMEC to share our insights with you today. We look forward to continuing our work with the Subcommittee to share information regarding how NCMEC uses technology to combat child sex trafficking.

Ms. MACE. I will now recognize Ms. Jones for introductory remarks.

STATEMENT OF MS. CARA JONES
CO-FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
MARINUS ANALYTICS

Ms. JONES. Thank you, Chairwoman Mace, Ranking Member Brown, and Members of the Subcommittee, for inviting me.

As a computer engineer and compassionate entrepreneur, I have led the deployment of Traffic Jam that has indexed and analyzed over 150 commercial sexual services websites to empower proactive safeguarding and to advance victim center policing in the digital age.

In 2019 in Oregon, Federal agents recovered a victim living in a small apartment with only a mattress on the floor. This victim had no say in the customers, no control over her schedule, and no understanding of her rights. Language barriers and fear prevented her from asking for help.

Behind the scenes, the traffickers were running a sophisticated operation, using data bases and custom software to market and schedule prostitution dates. The resulting indictment revealed bookings from a staggering 30,000 unique customers. She and 27 other victims were brought to safety during a nationwide takedown.

The Marinus Analytics Traffic Jam platform played a critical role uncovering the network's online footprint and propelling the case of one very driven Federal investigator from a local focus into an investigation across a dozen cities.

Every year, over 75 million ads for commercial sex flood the United States marketplace online. Hidden among them are a vast number of victims of trafficking. With over 1.3 billion records indexed, Traffic Jam delivers actionable insights in seconds, connecting ads, timelines, and networks, so investigators can focus on safeguarding and justice, not drowning in data.

Its intelligence strengthens cases and reduces the burden on victims and investigators, while expanding the burden of proof. Technology turns data into a clear story, corroborating testimony and enabling evidence-based prosecution that builds cases around victims, not on them.

A profound innovation is using AI ethically to screen missing persons for trafficking risk, enabling proactive safeguarding. In just two years, analyzing 60,000 missing persons records from 20 public sources, we detected 734 victims, 95 percent girls and young women, 84 percent victims of color, advertised online for sexual services.

Behind these numbers are heartbreaking realities. One missing 15-year-old was advertised for months, even through late stages of pregnancy. Today, automated screening for such cases means detection and recovery can happen in days, not months.

We are also detecting the systemic sources of exploitation preying on a growing number of adults sourced from international countries. In the U.K., we recently launched STAR that uses network clustering, risk scoring, and pattern analysis to uncover controlled prostitution rings with trafficking risk factors. STAR prioritizes these networks for enabling improved police investigation and, again, proactive safeguarding, an approach that could similarly strengthen United States efforts.

I would like to end by acknowledging the fact that human trafficking investigations remain among the most complex cases, with victims facing deeply layered needs. Prosecutions for what is considered one of the largest crime types are still far too low. Yet bright spots of disruption prove that progress is possible.

Proactive technology-driven intelligence can trigger Federal investigations even when victims cannot ask for help. It can link what initially seemed to be small local cases to regional, national, and even international networks. And it can strengthen a victim's story by supporting it with a footprint of online proof, advancing evidence-led prosecutions.

Through this contribution, we are committed to amplifying the momentum of regional task forces and frontline champions in the field, and we welcome continued dialog beyond this hearing to advance this vital mission together.

Thank you.

Ms. MACE. Thank you.

I will now recognize Mr. Austin for introductory remarks.

**STATEMENT OF MR. ROY L. AUSTIN JR.
DIRECTOR, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE INITIATIVE
HOWARD UNIVERSITY**

Mr. AUSTIN. Chairwoman Mace, Ranking Member Brown, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee——

Ms. MACE. Your mic.

Mr. AUSTIN. For more than two decades, my career has involved fighting human trafficking and supporting its survivors. As a Federal Prosecutor in Washington, D.C., I helped bring one of the city's first human trafficking prosecutions and helped launch the D.C. Human Trafficking Task Force. Later, as a Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Civil Rights Division, I supervised the human trafficking prosecution unit. Today, as Director of the Howard University School of Law's Artificial Intelligence Initiative, and as a longtime board member of Polaris, I continue this work from the perspective of law, policy, and technology.

No one, no one is more committed than I am to ensuring traffickers are identified, prosecuted, and convicted through lawful and ethical means. I hold firmly to the 1935 admonition from Supreme Court Justice George Sutherland, "But while a prosecutor may strike hard blows, he is not at liberty to strike foul ones. It is as much his duty to refrain from improper methods calculated to produce a wrongful conviction as it is to use every legitimate means to bring about a just one."

While I support the use of legitimate tools to end human trafficking, I have several concerns with artificial intelligence as a tool, each rooted in experience and principle. Only with necessary guardrails, including national standards, transparency, and oversight, can we ensure that artificial intelligence does not become another instrument of harm.

Artificial intelligence systems and agents are only as sound as the data upon which they are trained. Quality data must be accurate, comprehensive, and disaggregated. They must reflect the lived realities of all communities. Too often, datasets used to detect trafficking contain incomplete and biased information. This can distort results, misdirect investigations, and perpetuate racial and gender disparities. In an area where vendors are often the tail that wags the dog, we need clear Federal standards on data transparency, auditing, and accountability.

I am also deeply concerned with the proliferation of surveillance-based tools, from facial recognition to predictive algorithms. They are being used without sufficient safeguards. These technologies have well-documented accuracy gaps and can expand beyond their intended scope. Congress should ask, how long is human trafficking surveillance data retained? Who can access it? How is it used once a case is closed? Without strict limits, surveillance risks violating privacy while failing to deliver justice.

Human trafficking survivors deserve not only freedom, but dignity. Often minors or vulnerable adults, survivors must not be exposed through unwarranted data collection or retention that can come back to hurt them later in life. Survivor data should be encrypted, minimized, and used strictly for their protection. We must ensure that technology never retraumatizes those it aims to protect.

The rapid advancement of synthetic media creates new dangers. Deepfakes are fake but so close to reality that they make people believe that they are real. Deepfakes will compromise investigations, destroy reputations, and undermine evidentiary integrity. Congress has an essential role in addressing how deepfakes can be used, and we need to promote research on deepfake detection.

I am concerned with the burden that will be borne most by survivors and not by those who take advantage of them. Trafficking has always been both a supply-and-demand issue. But the demand side rarely faces the most risk for its conduct. Will artificial intelligence just further exacerbate this inequality?

With over 30 years of legal practice experience, I have come to the conclusion that the single-most important aspect of a legal system is trust. People have to trust that the legal system will follow the rule of law and treat all individuals equally and respectfully.

I am concerned because of the way the current Administration has been treating immigrants. All of us are well aware that a significant amount of human trafficking involves the immigrant community, whether sex or labor trafficking, in massage parlors, brothels, salons, farms, and plants. If the immigrant community does not feel comfortable going to and/or working with law enforcement, these cases will be even harder to successfully investigate or prosecute.

I know this because I have seen this. I was an Assistant United States Attorney in Washington, D.C., in the early 2000s when two Metropolitan Police Department officers brought evidence of trafficking to me. The reason we were able to prosecute that case, one of the first prosecuted in D.C., was because multiple survivors trusted law enforcement enough to report the pimp to them and then to remain witnesses despite feeling threatened by him.

What that case and dozens of other cases I was involved with required was humanity, not technology. That humanity must never be replaced.

Ms. MACE. Thank you.

And I will now recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Ms. Snow, I would like to start with you and NCMEC. How many kids are missing, roughly, do we know?

Ms. SNOW. I can speak to the number of missing child reports that NCMEC receives.

Ms. MACE. Okay.

Ms. SNOW. So, last year we received over 29,000 reports.

Ms. MACE. Just in one year?

Ms. SNOW. In one year.

Ms. MACE. And what is the total?

Ms. SNOW. That are reported missing? So, within National Crime Information Systems (NCIC), so the data base where law enforcement is reporting children missing, there are roughly around 500,000 children.

Ms. MACE. And then what percentage of those do you think you have in your data are repeat offenders, like for a lot of these children?

Ms. SNOW. Yes. We do see situations, especially children that are missing from child welfare care, where they may go missing multiple times and be reported to us multiple times.

Ms. MACE. Do you know what percentage of children are—fit that category?

Ms. SNOW. I do not have the exact number of the repeat missing incidents that are reported to us, but that is certainly something we could followup on.

Ms. MACE. And then how—when NCMEC gets evidence, how is it—how is it stored? Who has access to it? How are these individuals protected, the victims?

Ms. SNOW. Absolutely. So, an important question. I think what is important too is to maybe talk a little bit about how NCMEC becomes involved in these cases.

So, when NCMEC receives a report from a parent, legal guardian, law enforcement, or a member of child welfare who is reaching out to report a child missing, of course, they have first reported that to law enforcement and then reached out to NCMEC voluntarily to make a secondary report. At that point, we then become involved with intaking that case and then leveraging a suite of resources to provide support.

Ms. MACE. So, let us talk in theory, a hypothetical. Let us say somebody found a tape, a recording of a child or someone who looked over 12 but under 18, reported it to state law enforcement authorities. Would they then go to NCMEC and NCMEC then get involved, for example, or if it has already been reported to state authorities, does NCMEC not get involved? Does that make sense?

Ms. SNOW. Sure. So, at that point, if law enforcement were to reach out to NCMEC and request certain assistance regarding their investigation into that, we would be available to provide——

Ms. MACE. What kind of tools does NCMEC have in investigations to use, sort of figure some of this stuff out?

Ms. SNOW. So, in terms of—so I think you are talking a little bit more on the child sexual abuse materials side. So, I can speak to that briefly and then in terms of other colleagues of mine that have a little bit more——

Ms. MACE. But they could be trafficked? I mean——

Ms. SNOW. Certainly.

Ms. MACE [continuing]. If you find videos of children and sexual abuse.

Ms. SNOW. Absolutely. So, we do see a connection between child sexual abuse material and child sex trafficking. So, depending on if that child is known or unknown—so there are certain resources; certainly Traffic Jam and Spotlight. If we are trying to identify if that child may be involved in trafficking and may be featured in an online escort ad, we are going to leverage some tools that have resources for making that connection.

Ms. MACE. Does NCMEC do like forensic interviews with some of these children or is that a process of law enforcement?

Ms. SNOW. That is process solely of law enforcement and forensic interviewers that are connected outside of that system.

Ms. MACE. And then in terms of technology and trying to find the children who are victims of human trafficking, what has been the best case scenar-—what have you seen that has been very much working to the betterment of these victims with the advances of technology we see today?

Ms. SNOW. Yes. Thank you so much for that question.

I think there are three tools that I mentioned—Spotlight, Traffic Jam, and TraffickCam—that we use every single day in making connections between active missing children that are actively being exploited. And so, you know, with these being with small companies, it is so important that there are continued resources to support the innovation, the expansion, the growth, and then the ability to keep up with the trends in the field to ensure that we can continue to evolve with the offenders.

Ms. MACE. And then someone said earlier, technology should not be used on survivors. Was that Ms. Lundstrom or was that Ms. Snow? Who said that?

Ms. LUNDSTROM. That was me.

Ms. MACE. That was you? That really struck a chord with me. Can you just expand on that a little bit, how technology should not be used on survivors? Do you mean in terms of like when they come forward and—what do you mean? Can you expand on that for me?

Ms. LUNDSTROM. So, in terms of data collection, there comes a point at which it is extractive, the amount of information that is collected from survivors for the sole purpose of just having information, as opposed to making sure that an organization or an entity has the information necessary to meet the survivors' needs. And then when it comes to identifying trafficking, a very fine line, as Roy spoke about, where we tip into surveillance, and survivors are already experiencing surveillance by our traffickers.

Ms. MACE. And what do you think about the use of, in like depositions, of a survivor or a victim being filmed to get their responses when there is like an investigation or a prosecution or a civil suit? How traumatizing is that for victims?

Ms. LUNDSTROM. I cannot speak to all victims, but what I can share is, especially in cases where child sex abuse materials or pornography has been involved in their exploitation, things like recording can bring up a trauma response and feel reexploitative. And, so, that is why it is so important to have a trauma-informed approach to be transparent with that survivor to provide multiple options for recording, explain where it is going to be stored, who is going to access it, and when it will be destroyed.

Ms. MACE. Just one last question, if you do not mind. I will give you 30 seconds more.

How many states do trauma-informed investigations, do you think?

Ms. LUNDSTROM. I do not know that number off the top of my head.

Ms. MACE. Okay. Thank you.

And I yield back and 38 extra seconds to my colleague, Ms. Brown.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you, Chairwoman.

Given the gravity of the crime and the life-altering impact it has on survivors, we must leverage all available technologies to combat human trafficking. But the government must deploy these tools responsibly, trafficking targets that are vulnerable, and we must ensure that our tools empower law enforcement without harming survivors.

So, Ms. Lundstrom, can you speak briefly to the importance of supporting survivors when adopting any technology to combat human trafficking?

And then, Ms. Snow, I am going to ask you to followup and discuss how your company's platforms are designed to avoid bias and keep survivors' needs front and center.

Ms. LUNDSTROM. Do you mind restating the question?

Ms. BROWN. Yes, sure. Can you speak briefly to the importance of supporting survivors when adopting any technology to combat human trafficking?

Ms. LUNDSTROM. Absolutely. So, I can just share the example around our causal AI model and how Polaris has approached that. The build from that and, like all of our work, has come from listening to survivors over the last 23 years. Eighteen of those years was around listening to survivors through the National Human Trafficking Hotline. And so, understanding the needs of survivors and the experiences of survivors is where we come into the creation of anything.

So, when we first started creating that model, we asked survivors to come to the table and brainstorm as thought partners from day one. From that time forward, survivors have continued to be involved at varying levels and in different ways around as we have designed and continue to build out and test that model, and they will continue to be involved.

So, our priority at Polaris is compensating survivors anytime they are providing input because that lived experience is a very unique skill set and expertise. So, that is very high level how we have done it, and we have replicated that practice across all of our programs and initiatives.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you. I appreciate that.

Ms. SNOW. Yes, thank you so much for your question.

I will provide one example that I think highlights our commitment to including survivors at the table from the beginning and ensuring we are avoiding bias and blind spots in what we are doing.

So, every single missing child report that is made to NCMEC is screened for possible child sex trafficking. And the way that we have developed that risk assessment tool was, you know, with subject matter experts as well as survivors over the last decade, where we have routinely involved them in the review of those screening indicators, ensuring that we do not have blind spots or bias as we are creating that.

Recently, we just transferred that lived experience information and subject matter expertise into a tool that is now being leveraged to screen missing child cases, as well as the information that is coming in from cyber tip line reports, by Electronic Service Provider (ESP)s, and members of the public, to make sure that we are looking across all entities and connecting data in ways that can surface concerns as well as trafficking indicators. So, that is one example about how we have continued to include survivors along the way to ensure that we are avoiding those pitfalls.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you.

And, Ms. Jones, same question. You need me to repeat it?

Ms. JONES. Please do.

Ms. BROWN. So, can you please discuss how your company's platforms are designed to avoid bias and keep survivors' needs front and center?

Ms. JONES. Well, one thing I will say is that we are in service to the front-line professionals who operate our tool. In many of the use cases, it is really just to recall the important insights that are relevant to the case. So, it is just AI to help recall information, and then the user can discern the true positives versus false positives, looking at other elements of the evidence to corroborate its accuracy.

And the other—the concern about bias, I will also just bring up this example. We are concerned about underserving the victims. So, in this journey, we have long thought about helping identify missing vulnerable youth, but for many years, the capabilities were not operationally effective yet. And when image search tools became available and there was concern about, you know, how they were trained and their effectiveness, it is about protecting the victims' civil rights by finding that information and having first responders support those victims who cannot ask for help.

So, the limitations in the model, you know, resulted in the inability to uncover those important insights to then react and recover victims. So, over the years, those models, like image processing, have gotten stronger and it has led to a greater recovery of trafficked children.

The other thing I will just say is that we work very closely with the experts who understand kind of the elements of control and vulnerability, and what we try to do is just save time in the way we put these algorithms together so that they are able to maximize their efforts and nothing is a blind box or a black box. It is just, you know, pulling more records together in a time-efficient way so that they have the information they can then review and make expert decisions on how to use.

Ms. BROWN. Okay. Thank you.

And that seems to have exhausted my time, so I yield back. Thank you.

Ms. MACE. I will now recognize Representative Burlison for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for hosting this. This is such an important topic.

Human trafficking has got to be the most heinous crime imaginable, if not one of. It is just unbelievable. I mean, it is not exactly the topic you want to talk about every day. But it is important—it is one of the most important things we can and should be doing. And so I am glad that we are having this hearing.

I am also really somewhat inspired by the innovative things that you all are doing to kind of approach this issue, which is fantastic. So, I wanted to hear from you today a little bit more about what is working and what is not working.

And I will begin by asking question of Ms. Snow. How does—can you walk me through what your AI process is and how does it identify a potential trafficking case?

Ms. SNOW. Absolutely. Thank you so much for your question.

So, in terms of how NCMEC is currently utilizing AI—and, of course, there is a variety of different ways, but one that I will men-

tion right now. So, as we are continuing to receive an increase in volume, especially in our reports, we have identified that we need to make sure that we are creating a safety net, right, to leverage and make sure that all of the data points—so in a missing child case we can have—in a single missing child case we can have 500 unique data points. In a single cyber tip line report we can have up to a thousand data points. And so, the reality of being able to make those nuanced connections that can surface clear indicators of possible child sex trafficking is something that is exceeding human capacity with the volume of reports that we have.

So, by now layering in an AI component, specifically on the missing child cases that we have reported to us, it has allowed us to implement a system, again, that is leveraging decades of subject matter expertise and survivor knowledge, to pull the nuanced data points that, you know—of course, when we find an online escort ad, that is a clear indicator. But there are a lot of other nuanced indicators that we now know that, when we stack them together, create a more reliable indicator of possible trafficking.

Mr. BURLISON. Okay. So, are you also pulling data from, say, like AMBER Alerts or—any of the data that is gathered from any kind of child abduction?

Ms. SNOW. So, if there was a situation where we identified, within a family abduction or a child abduction case, that there was likely indicators of trafficking, that would be, of course, a part of that process.

Mr. BURLISON. Okay. Let me ask you this. Why—why do these traffickers, apparently from your written testimony, you said that they are often on the open web. You would think that they would be doing this on the dark web. Why would they be so brazen to do it on the open web?

Ms. SNOW. Yes. Thank you for your question. And really the very simple answer to that is that is where the kids are, right. Traffickers are going to be in places where they can have access to children and where they can begin to identify the vulnerabilities that those children are sharing that allows an entry point for a trafficker to then take advantage of that.

Mr. BURLISON. So, I am a father of two daughters. We try to lock down as much social media and as much access as possible because of that. Because, you know, just fear for this. But what advice do you have for parents like us that really just want to keep your kids safe and—what should also as a parent be aware of? If your child is—like, what social media apps are at most risk or where—where are the children most at risk?

Ms. SNOW. Yes. I appreciate that question, and empathize as a parent as well.

So, NCMEC has a variety of resources, prevention tools, called NetSmartz. And that provides parents, teachers, concerned and trusted adults, with a whole suite of resources that you can utilize to engage, you know, kids of all ages in online safety conversations that are absolutely crucial to be having as early as possible.

Mr. BURLISON. Because the traffickers, basically, open up the line of communication or some kind of dialog and then they go from there.

Ms. SNOW. Absolutely.

Mr. BURLISON. Ms. Lundstrom, what is your process? Like, when you are sharing data with law enforcement, how do you do that without compromising the victim's privacy? How do you work collaboratively with law enforcement?

Ms. LUNDSTROM. Thank you for that question, and happy to answer it.

In running the National Human Trafficking Hotline for the last 18 years, our team has developed over 300 protocols around identifying trafficking situations and determining whether or not a situation needs to be reported to law enforcement. So, we start, first and foremost, with the laws, recognizing that we are mandated reporters and we have a duty to report instances that involve individuals who are suspected to be under the age of 18, are at imminent harm or danger, and when survivors want to report.

And so, we have an entire protocol around that decisionmaking process that we have used, and it is very nuanced. That sounds very simple, and the reality is that it is not.

So, one of the examples that I like to share to give a little bit more context to that decision is, what if we have a survivor that calls in on behalf of several other survivors, and we are able to get the caller's consent, but we cannot confirm if the other survivors who are maybe all over the age of 18 want to report to law enforcement as well? So, those protocols really break down how to best make those decisions.

Mr. BURLISON. Okay. Thank you.

My time has expired. I yield back.

Ms. MACE. Thank you.

I will now recognize Mr. Subramanyam for 5 minutes.

Mr. SUBRAMANYAM. Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think everyone agrees this is an incredibly difficult, complex but important problem we have to solve. And I think it is affecting 27 million people, I think last I saw, across the world. And, you know, I really appreciate all the work that this panel is doing to combat it using cutting-edge technology.

But I am very concerned right now by what is going on in this Administration with gutting so many different Federal grant programs and so many different offices that fight trafficking across the world and across our country. And, you know, I will just read out some of these.

The Department of State, the Department of Justice, the Department of Labor, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Homeland Security, have all cut funding or programs or people working on trying to fight human trafficking.

And I think there are 69 international programs aimed at combating child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking that were terminated. Seventy percent of the workforce at the State Department's agency in charge with monitoring and combating trafficking was cut. The Department of Labor cut $500 million in grant programs for programs used to combat trafficking. And I can keep going, but you get my point.

Mr. Austin, is it waste, fraud, and abuse to cut all these programs? Are we cutting waste, fraud, and abuse by doing that? What are we accomplishing by cutting these programs?

Mr. AUSTIN. We are hurting the effort to actually try to stop human trafficking. We are moving resources where they do not need to be, such as nonviolent immigrants, when we really need enormous resources if we are actually going to do something about human trafficking.

Mr. SUBRAMANYAM. One of the grant programs was aimed at training law enforcement on investigating trafficking, particularly involving people with disabilities. Could you explain the importance of that? That was cut as well.

Mr. AUSTIN. I mean, it is enormous, because people with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to trafficking, and so you need to have programs that actually meet the needs. So, understanding the needs, understanding the type of people who are being trafficked, you must have programs that actually dig into that and answer those questions.

You cannot do this work through just technology. You have to have humans. You have to have human beings who are actually making the evaluations. You have to know the types of people who are being trafficked and the people who are doing the trafficking.

Mr. SUBRAMANYAM. I am trying to make the argument for why they would cut these programs. Perhaps, maybe the government should not be involved in fighting human trafficking. I do not know. What are your thoughts on—what is the impact of cutting both these programs? As well as we have cut jobs for technologists across the Federal Government, and we are now having trouble recruiting and retaining technologists as well. So, we are talking about the intersection of technology and fighting trafficking. Right now we are not going to be doing a very good job in the Federal Government on this.

Could you explain to me sort of what the role should be? What should we be doing as a Federal Government to fight trafficking?

Mr. AUSTIN. As a Federal Prosecutor, we needed more resources. We needed more information. We needed more Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) who could provide us with information. We needed more technologists who could help us with these things.

If we really and truly care about these issues, our budget really determines where—you know, what we care about. And, right now, what our budget is saying is that we really do not care about these things and that we are going to allow them to happen, which is really problematic after hearing the unbelievable testimony from my fellows on this panel. You know, we need to be putting more effort into this, and right now we are putting less.

Mr. SUBRAMANYAM. Did I miss any programs that were cut that you think are worth highlighting?

Mr. AUSTIN. The entire Civil Rights Division.

Mr. SUBRAMANYAM. Tell me more about that.

Mr. AUSTIN. I mean, we had the Human Trafficking Protection Unit under the Civil Rights Division. It was moved, but it was never big enough. It belongs in the Civil Rights Division. The work that it does in schools, the work that it does on housing, the work that it does on employment, are all relevant to the fight against human trafficking. And you dismantle the Civil Rights Division, and you dismantle one of the main tools that could be used to help survivors.

Mr. SUBRAMANYAM. I request unanimous consent to enter into the record a September 17, 2025, article entitled, "Revealed: Trump Administration retreats on combating human trafficking and child exploitation."

Ms. MACE. So ordered.

Mr. SUBRAMANYAM. And so, I think if we are going to actually take this problem seriously, then we are going to have to put some funding and put some good people behind this effort to combat trafficking.

I love the idea of using technology to address this issue. We should use technology. We should use human beings. We should use partnerships with law enforcement at local, state level, and around the world. This is an all-hands-on-deck effort that we will need to fight trafficking, but we are not going to do it if this Administration continues to retreat on combating human trafficking and child exploitation.

I yield back.

Ms. MACE. All right. Thank you.

And in closing, I want to thank our panelists once again for their testimony today.

I would like to yield to the Ranking Member, Ms. Brown, for closing remarks.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

I think what we discovered today, that there are many modern tools available to combat human trafficking, and they rely on large amounts of data. Law enforcement must monitor enormous amounts of internet activity to identify predators, as they are looking for a few extremely dangerous needles in an enormous, an enormous haystack.

Instead of investigating and catching traffickers, this Administration has prioritized sending unidentified masked men into our communities to stoke fear and detain whomever they like at random. In fact, they have pulled law enforcement away from critical missions, including fighting transnational criminal terrorist organizations and organized crime, only to have them support street-level work, detaining people at traffic stops and monitoring student protestors.

The data shows that this Administration has diverted more than 28,000 law enforcement agents for their supposed crackdown on immigration. And according to The New York Times, between February and April of this year, Homeland Security worked 33 percent less cases of child exploitation cases than in the previous years.

So, I say all that to remind everyone listening and paying attention, yes, modern technology can unlock critical opportunities in the fight against human trafficking. Unfortunately, the President and his Administration has prioritized terrorizing American communities over protecting the vulnerable who suffer the most from human trafficking. So, it is my hope that we can find some bipartisan solutions to address this critical issue that is impacting so many.

I want to thank the witnesses again for their incredible work.

And with that, Madam Chair, I yield back.

Ms. MACE. Thank you.

With that, without objection, all Members will have 5 legislative days within which to submit materials and to submit additional written questions for the witnesses which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:35 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

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