

October 20, 2023

The Honorable Shalanda Young
Director, Office of Management and Budget
Executive Office of the President
725 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Young,

The undersigned organizations respectfully write to you to request to maintain or moderately increase current budget levels for FY 2025 for accounts that assist in combating Online Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Children (OSEAC).

OSEAC is one of the fastest growing crimes and threats against children. The [US Sentencing Commission's October 2021 report](#), which studied child sexual abuse image producers, found that OSEAC has increased by a staggering 422% over the last fifteen years. From 2021-2022, cybertips submitted to the [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children \(NCMEC\)](#) of suspected OSEAC and child sexual abuse materials (CSAM), dramatically rose from 29.3 million reports to over 32 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation, which included 49,404,779 image files, 37,775,034 video files, and 1,197,394 other files.

The rise in OSEAC has increased dramatically due in part to the rise of social media and the lack of privacy protections online, allowing perpetrators and abusers to reach children through apps, websites, and video gaming platforms. [In the last 20 years, reports of CSAM have increased by 10,000%](#). The more recent rise in OSEAC can also be attributed to the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), which created a perfect storm that increased children's risk of experiencing OSEAC. The world shifted to an online environment with teleworking and remote learning. Unfortunately, predators leveraged this as an opportunity to further target children.

Children are being targeted and exploited at increasingly younger ages. According to the [Canadian Centre for Child Protection](#), a staggering 78% of the images and videos assessed were under age 12 and 63% were under age 8. [Among that same material](#), they found that 80% of the children were girls, while 19% were boys.

The methods and platforms used to groom children are constantly evolving and adapting to the online world we live in today, forcing law enforcement, government agencies, and NGOs working to prevent and respond to OSEAC to similarly change their tactics and tools in response.

Perpetrators are also often known to the child victim. According to the [US Sentencing Commission's report](#), "Of the 512 child pornography production offenders sentenced in fiscal year 2019, 60.3 percent were related to or otherwise maintained a position of trust over the minor victim, whether through familial relationships or by virtue of the offender's role as a

teacher or a coach.” With limited resources, United States law enforcement agencies are increasingly unable to adequately prioritize and respond to the rapidly growing number of CyberTips and are unable to proactively work cases of child sexual exploitation in their own jurisdiction.

Despite the rapid rise in reports of suspected OSEAC and child sexual abuse materials (CSAM) over the past decade, the number of federal prosecutions has actually fallen. In addition to the staggering numbers above, over 325,000 suspect leads sit in Department of Justice funded databases but are not being worked.¹ Based on multiple studies over the last decade, between [50-80% of these suspects](#) are also likely to be committing hands-on offenses against children in their communities.

Communities across the country and internationally must be equipped with the necessary resources and professional training, in order to adequately prevent and respond to the victimization of children on the internet.

We ask to maintain or moderately increase the accounts below and for substantial funding to be allocated to protect children from these crimes and help end the cycle of abuse and trauma that they ultimately face. Funding for a holistic, multi-faceted, and multidisciplinary approach is critical to ending OSEAC. Children throughout the country and globally deserve to be safe from harm, and we must work to protect them from those that wish to exploit and abuse them.

Missing and Exploited Children Programs - at least \$150 million

We request at least \$150 million for Missing and Exploited Children programs as described below. This represents full authorized funding for both the ICAC Task Forces and the National Center For Missing and Exploited Children. Additionally this includes necessary funding for the ICAC Training and Technical Assistance programs under the Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice Dependency Prevention (OJJDP), as well as the AMBER Alert system and AMBER in Indian Country Training and Technical Assistance programs and the Missing & Exploited Children Training and Technical Assistance programs.

These offices and programs support coordination between states and the federal government on cases related to missing, exploited and abused children, including cases of online sexual exploitation and abuse. This funding request aligns with the President’s Budget Request for FY24 and reflects the dire need for increased funding to respond to the exponential growth in OSEAC and the need to protect children online and offline.

Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program (ICAC) - \$60 million

We request full funding in the amount of \$60 million for the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program (ICAC), as authorized under the PROTECT Our Children Act of 2008, which was originally led by then Senator Biden. ICAC is a national network of state and local law enforcement agencies. As children continue to face increased vulnerabilities, we must

¹ US Department of Justice, ICAC Child Online Protection System; 2021.

respond by ensuring sustainable solutions are not only developed, but also meet the investigative and training needs of agencies that are responding to technological advances that allow for victimization of children. According to the [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention](#), at least 850,028 law enforcement officers have been trained on techniques to investigate and prosecute internet crimes against children-related cases since the creation of the ICAC program.

We request \$10 million of the ICAC funding to be dedicated to ICAC training and technical support, specifically the ICAC training providers; Fox Valley Technical College, SEARCH, National White Collar Crime Center, Innocent Justice Foundation. This dedicated funding will ensure the continuity of vital training by these providers and ensure that agencies are able to engage in reactive and proactive investigations, forensic and criminal investigations and prosecutions, and prevention and community education as outlined in the Protect Our Children Act of 2008.

We request that \$3 million of the ICAC funding be dedicated to support existing technologies and to research new technologies used to investigate offenders who manufacture, possess and trade child sexual abuse images, with an additional \$1 million set-aside to support the ICACCOPS system. Studies have shown that convicted offenders victimize an average of 33 children before being apprehended. Federal, State and local law enforcement officers need the tools and training necessary to successfully interdict these crimes, identify the victims and provide services to them and their families.

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) - \$50 million

We request funding in the amount of \$50 million to enable the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) to carry out its statutory requirements under the Missing Children's Assistance Act. NCMEC serves as the congressionally-designated clearinghouse and resource center on missing and exploited children issues. NCMEC is statutorily required to operate 15 separate programs relating to its mission with the funding it receives from the federal government. One of these 15 programs is directed to NCMEC's work to combat child sexual exploitation and it is composed of two separate programs: (1) operating the CyberTipline, the designated reporting mechanism for internet service providers and the public of suspected OSEAC and child sexual abuse material that are handled by NCMEC and made available to international, federal and state law enforcement agencies for review and potential investigation; and (2) operating the Child Victim Identification Program to help identify unidentified child victims depicted in sexually abusive imagery so they can be identified and rescued by law enforcement.

Funding for NCMEC is critical, as it plays a crucial role in assisting child victims, families, law enforcement, and the government in helping to find missing children, reducing child sexual exploitation, and preventing child victimization.

To date, as part of NCMEC's efforts to combat child sexual exploitation, it has received more than 173 million reports relating to child sexual exploitation reported to its CyberTipline,

reviewed more than 394 million images and videos to assist in identifying children depicted in sexually exploitative imagery, and helped law enforcement identify over 26,000 child victims. The online threats to child safety continue to evolve and the volume of incidents of online child sexual exploitation continue to increase exponentially. Therefore, it is vitally important NCMEC receives full funding in order to respond to these growing risks. Additional funding will ensure NCMEC is able to continue its vital work in combating OSEAC and protecting children from further victimization.

Victims of Child Abuse Programs - \$50 million

We request \$50 million for programs related to the implementation of the Victims of Child Abuse Act. These programs include Child Advocacy Centers (CACs), which provide support services to around [200,000 child survivors of abuse](#), including OSEAC, each year. CACs provide critical, evidence-based, trauma-informed programs that support child survivors' mental health and aid their recovery. Childhood trauma resulting from abuse and other types of violence has been shown to raise [children's risk of experiencing lifelong negative effects](#) on their physical and mental health and wellbeing, including depression, substance abuse, heart disease, cancer and stroke. However, these risks can be mitigated when child survivors are provided with comprehensive response services, like those provided by CACs.

While CACs are partly funded by the Crime Victims Fund, ever-changing obligation caps for the fund that ebb and flow every year depending on the amount of criminal fines and penalties collected by federal courts, make it difficult for CACs to provide consistent programming and services. Funding for this account allows for CACs throughout the country to continue and maintain their range of vital services regardless of the annual cap. Additional funding will further shore up CACs' budgets and allow them to expand their services to more child survivors.

Crime Victims Fund - Critical funding

The Office for Victims of Crime in the Department of Justice oversees and disburses funding from the Crime Victims Fund to states and NGOs to support survivors of crime, including child survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation, through assistance and compensation programs like Child Advocacy Centers. Despite the growing need and demand for these support programs, recent years' final budget caps for the Crime Victims Fund have steadily decreased. While we understand these decreases were related to the depleting balance of the Crime Victims Fund, the real impact has severely restrained the services and support that can be provided to survivors. While we understand the current challenges facing Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding, we urge you to request funding as close to last year's VOCA allocation as possible to limit the impact of potential cuts.

Homeland Security Investigations including specific funding for Child Exploitation Investigations

In FY22, C3 and HSI efforts resulted in the identification and/or rescue of 1,170 child victims in child exploitation investigations and the arrest of 4,459 individuals for crimes involving the sexual exploitation of children. With its victim-centered approach at the forefront of operations, HSI victim assistance specialists assisted more than 300 child exploitation victims in the last

fiscal year and continues to provide critical assistance to victims of criminal acts. Additional funding is needed to build on these successes.

Child exploitation investigations - \$100 million in new funding

We request that the budget for the Cyber Crime Center be separated out in the DHS budget and elevated to a department-wide program under the office of the Secretary. We also request an additional \$100 million in new funding be allocated to Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) specifically for child exploitation investigations on top of the existing budget allocations for HSI operations. Current allocations for investigations are inadequate to respond to the exponential growth in OSEAC and the increasing cost associated with its investigation. HSI has a critical need for additional staffing and technological resources not addressed in its routine annual appropriations. An increase in staff at all levels is needed to keep up with the increasing volume of OSEAC crime. This includes Special Agents and Intelligence Analysts to investigate cases, Special Assistant United States Attorneys to prosecute cases, and their associated support staff. As an example, the HSI Child Exploitation Investigations Unit (CEIU) is currently staffed at a ratio of one Intelligence Analyst per twelve Special Agents, while the government wide standard is generally around one to six.

Funding is also needed to address the high cost associated with the rapidly advancing technology needed to pursue these cases. As new communication methods and technologies reach the market, online perpetrators quickly adapt and change practices. Law enforcement has the unenviable role of being caught in a constant cycle of catch up. This is particularly impactful of OSEAC. HSI has an immediate and continuing need to identify and develop new technologies to both identify OSEAC offenders and collect the required evidence to rescue children and prosecute crime.

Despite the number of CyberTipline reports to NCMEC increasing year upon year, the number of federal prosecutions between 2016 and 2020 for OSEAC declined. The sheer volume of reports and limited staffing in combination with the high level of specialized expertise, cyber skills, and continual training on technological advances necessary to thoroughly investigate these crimes severely constrains current efforts. Additional funding specifically for child exploitation investigations would increase HSI's capacity to interdict child sexual abuse image offenders and identify children seen in these images who remain unidentified and remove them from exploitation.

HSI Cyber Crimes Center – Critical increases

We request robust increases for HSI's Cyber Crimes Center. The Cyber Crime Center (C3) includes the Child Exploitation Investigations Unit and the Computer Forensics Unit, as well as the Child Victim Identification Program which analyzes child sexual abuse materials in an effort to identify and rescue children seen in sexually abusive imagery. Each of these programs requires additional resources to continue to be successful. Last year, these programs collectively analyzed over seven petabytes of data and were resource limited from accomplishing more. C3 requires additional staffing, computer capacity, and the development and acquisition of advanced technology to keep up with online perpetrators.

Additional funding for the Cyber Crimes Center would support the expansion of large scale international CSAM investigations, which historically have interdicted some of the most violent child sex abusers around the globe, some of whom order the live-streaming sexual abuse of children as young as infants and toddlers. These cases often require close coordination with foreign law enforcement and often depend on their capacity, which in many cases is unavailable or limited. Additional funding is needed to facilitate the coordination, training, and direct support to pursue cases in the best interest of the United States. A great example of this is Operation Renewed Hope. So far, this operation has identified over 300 probable new victims of OSEAC and rescued or provided services to over 60 victims. This operation would not have been possible without the direct support of 25 countries. Due to a lack of needed funding, the success of this operation also depended on the financial assistance of Non-Governmental Organizations.

C3 also runs the HERO Child Rescue Corps and provides state and local forensic assistance to law enforcement agencies across the US with advanced forensic retrieval techniques. The program provides training, an internship, and a path to a civilian career in computer forensics while simultaneously supporting OSEAC investigations. Increasing funding for this program will assist both veterans and C3 efforts equally.

The Child Victim Identification Program needs additional funding to support the growth of both staffing and technology. The current program is currently working to double its capacity and will require continued growth to keep up. The use of Artificial Intelligence to both create images and as a tool to combat OSEAC is an expensive but necessary proposition. This program will need increased funding to address this challenge.

The Cyber Crimes Center works closely with the National Center on Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) and Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Forces to support online sexual exploitation and abuse of children investigations. Digital evidence plays a critical role in the identification of child victims and offenders in addition to supporting criminal prosecutions. With digital technologies and encryption becoming more sophisticated and the number of CyberTips growing exponentially, it is critical for all units of the Cyber Crime Center to receive robust funding to continue developing new tools and techniques to gather digital evidence.

Child Exploitation Investigations Unit (CEIU) – \$30 million

We request \$30 million for the Child Exploitation Investigations Unit (CEIU). The CEIU specifically focuses on investigations related to the sexual exploitation of children, including the production and distribution of child sexual abuse materials. CEIU's initiatives include: Operation Predator, which targets offenders, including those that produce child sexual abuse materials; the Virtual Global Taskforce, which supports collaboration between domestic and international law enforcement agencies and private sector partners against online sexual exploitation and abuse; the National Child Victim Identification System, which supports law enforcement's ability to identify victims of sexual exploitation; and the Victim Identification Program, which supports the rescue of children who are depicted in child sexual abuse material. Additional funding would allow for the CEIU to increase the number of investigations it is able to support. It would also

expand the above-mentioned programs, resulting in additional victims of online sexual exploitation of children being identified and removed from harmful situations.

Child Protection Compacts – \$15 million

We request \$15 million for the Child Protection Compact (CPC) program. Despite the exponential increase in the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children globally over the past decade, many governments around the world do not have the infrastructure and capacity necessary to adequately respond to and investigate suspected cases. CPCs are \$5 million multi-year commitments between the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (JTIP) and partner governments to collaborate to reduce child trafficking. CPCs support the sustainable development of partner governments' capacity to prevent and respond to child trafficking, including OSEAC. The Philippines, a global OSEAC hotspot, has signed two CPCs. This has supported the government in increasing its capacity to identify victims of online sexual exploitation and abuse, provide effective and appropriate child protective services, identify perpetrators and bring them to justice and improve the prevention of OSEAC. An allocation of at least \$15 million for the CPC program will allow for three more compacts with additional countries.

The exponential growth in OSEAC, related both to the rise of social media and lack of privacy protections online and the Covid-19 pandemic's persistent consequences, requires a substantial response in government resources to protect children online and offline. As organizations working together to eliminate the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children, we were encouraged by the Biden administration's own call to improve internet safety by launching the White House Task Force to Address Online Harassment and Abuse in June 2022 and the Interagency Task Force for Kids Online Health and Safety. We are hopeful that the administration will show a similar commitment to addressing online violence in the FY25 President's Budget.

As such, we respectfully urge you to request maintained or moderately increased levels for the above accounts that assist in combating the online sexual exploitation and abuse of children. We understand you face difficult budget choices and there are many priorities you must consider, but we strongly believe our children deserve to be one of these priorities. We look forward to working with you and with Congress to secure the funding necessary to combat OSEAC, which will help safeguard children and provide necessary resources to mitigate crimes and threats against them. This robust increase in funding is an investment not just in combating OSEAC but an investment in our most precious resource — our children.

Sincerely,

Alignment Government Strategies
Anonymous Lived Experience Advocate
Augusta Associates, LLC
Child Rescue Coalition
ChildFund International
Children's Justice Fund

Enough is Enough
Global Hope 365
Lynn's Warriors
MVP Task Force
National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE)
National Child Protection Task Force
National Children's Alliance
PACT
Protect Young Eyes
Raven
Thorn
Together for Girls