

Testimony of
Randall Hillman

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Executive Director, Alabama District Attorneys Association
United States Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs
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It is an honor and privilege to appear before you today. It is especially significant that we appear before you on a subject so vital to the future of effective law enforcement and prosecutors everywhere. What we discuss this day will make a difference for generations to come.

While the internet has been a great advancement and has made our world a much smaller place, it is not without its dark side. Those who would exploit our children, including child predators and child pornographers, were once relegated to back alleys and back rooms as places to engage in their terrible crimes. Now, with an internet connection and a few clicks of a mouse, that same criminal has an open window into the bedrooms of our children.

Our research has indicated that state and local law enforcement agents will handle well over 90 percent of the cases in America's criminal justice system annually. State and local law enforcement and prosecutors are the emergency room doctors of the justice system. We are on the front lines of fighting child predators and child molesters every day.

In the past 50 years there have been two major watershed events in the criminal justice arena, the advent of the science of DNA and that of digital storage and communication devices. While DNA is relevant in many investigations, its impact pales in comparison to the numbers of criminal cases in which digital evidence is found. We are trained and skilled at investigating robbery cases, murders, rapes and other similar crimes. Yet, too often, when a call comes into that same department that a child has been cyber-stalked by a sexual predator via some communication device, the caller is met with silence. While some larger law enforcement departments have available resources to handle these cases, the majority of other agencies are caught short. Simply put, we know about blood and bullets, but we are sorely lacking in our ability to deal with megabytes and megapixels. The most glaring disconnect in the push to eliminate child predators lies in our lack of training. This is due to two equally important factors, cost of training and availability of training. Ladies and gentlemen of the Committee, we are asking you to leverage us as a resource. If properly trained, we would be a potential investigative army striking at the core of the most vile of all criminals - those who exploit and prey on children.

The National Computer Forensics Institute (NCFI) was created as a solution to the lack of cyber-crime training for law enforcement, prosecutors and trial judges throughout the United States.

This training facility was conceived, developed and will soon begin the implementation of curricula driven from a law enforcement perspective. The methods employed there are time-tested and proven in countless courts across this nation. Purposefully, it is not from academia and is not merely a theoretical exercise, but is designed to maximize our ability to catch and incarcerate cyber criminals.

The NCFI is a partnership of federal, state and local governments who recognized the huge void in this area and joined together to solve the problem. This partnership includes the United States Department of Homeland Security, the United States Secret Service, the State of Alabama, the Alabama District Attorneys Association and the City of Hoover, Alabama. The NCFI is approximately 90% complete and will begin training state and local law enforcement, prosecutors and trial judges May 19, 2008. Once complete, the NCFI will have the ability to train nearly 1700 students per year in all facets of digital evidence from first responders to network intrusions to forensic examinations. Most importantly for today's hearing, the NCFI will equip state and local law enforcement officers to effectively investigate child pornography cases. The NCFI will teach law enforcement officers to use the most advanced law enforcement technology, including the technique presented to the sub-committee by Special Agent Flint Waters, to insure that the worst abusers are brought to justice. In addition to classroom and hands-on instruction we will have students practice courtroom skills using the in-house smart courtroom. This training will be provided at absolutely no cost to trainees and many will be provided with equipment, hardware and software to carry out their newly acquired skills.

Because the NCFI was designed by law enforcement for law enforcement, because we have a brand new state of the art facility designed exclusively for this type of training, because this training is free of charge to all participants, and because this is our sole function, I am convinced that the NCFI is the best tool this nation has to fill the training gap that currently exists for state and local law enforcement regarding child exploitation and child predator cases.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, you are in a truly unique position. Through this bill, you can make a substantial impact on the lives of people who can not help themselves. Children are our most precious asset and are, at the same time, our most vulnerable one. I would humbly ask on behalf of all law enforcement, federal and state, that you give us the training and tools we so desperately need to see that our children are safe from those who would harm them.