WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF DETECTIVE CHRIS JOHNSON
Reno Police Department
House Bill 1046 & Senate Bill 762 – Facial Recognition Technology

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. I am a detective with the Reno Police Department and I've seen first hand how facial recognition technology using an open source database can save the lives of exploited and abused children. Currently, I have been with the police department for over 9 years and have worked various assignments from patrol, being a field training officer, hostage negotiator, narcotics detective and now a detective assigned to investigate human trafficking assigned to the Regional Human Exploitation and Trafficking Unit (H.E.A.T).

Facial Recognition Technology Using an Open Source Database Saved a Trafficked Child

Detectives within Northern Nevada's Regional Human Exploitation and Trafficking Unit only had a few days to identify and save a child sexual exploitation victim before she left the city. The HEAT Unit monitors online prostitution ads to try and identify human trafficking victims. One ad in particular raised concern since the individual appeared to be a minor yet had facial tattoos—an unusual combination. We wanted to recover the victim from her trafficker before she moved from Reno to other major cities, but had no way to identify her. Online ads for prostitution do not use real names, and even the phone numbers are usually VoIP numbers that the police cannot associate with a known individual. Failure to rescue the victim while in Reno would expose the child to continued danger and possibly undermine established leads.

We then submitted one of the facial images from the ads in a facial recognition technology software that uses an open source database and within 10 to 15 seconds we had a possible lead, including a link to a publically available Instagram page. By researching the contents of the public Instagram profile, including comments on posts and other identifying information, we positively identified the victim within two hours of running the search—and also confirmed that she was a 16 year old juvenile. After this development, detectives conducted an undercover operation and recovered the victim from her trafficker, who was arrested that night.

At any given time, there may be thousands of prostitution advertisements posted online in a particular geographic region. This could imply a substantial amount of individuals are being

actively victimized. Law enforcement must in turn triage these potential victims, many of whom may be unidentified, with juvenile victims being the utmost priority in this process. Facial recognition technology offers law enforcement the ability to efficiently analyze images associated to these advertisements and determine the most critical victims requiring immediate law enforcement intervention.

Without the triage process and this technology which directly supports it, the 16 year old victim may not have been receovered.

Limiting the Database to the Motor Vehicle Division (MVA) and Mug Shots Would Have Resulted in Limited (if any) Leads

This 16 year old girl who was sex trafficked since she was 13 had no driver's license and no mug shot. If we had not used the open source database, we likely would have not rescued her at this point. And this is not a unique fact to her—many exploited children will not be found in MVA databases or mug shots. Furthermore, while it is critical for law enforcement agencies to have policies and procedures in place for the use of facial recognition technology, child trafficking cases move and change rapidly. Many of these children are moved from location to location on a regular basis. If we had waited for approval from another agency, which could take days or weeks and then had to wait again for the searches to be run—the 16 year girl would have been gone.
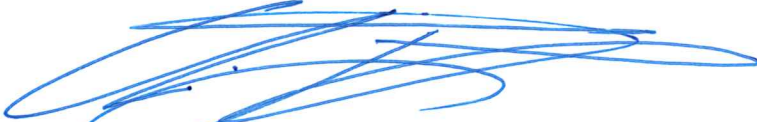
Facial Recognition Technology is One Piece of the Investigation

Within the HEAT Unit, facial recognition technology is used for after-the-fact investigations. Once we locate an image to use, we run it against the open source database. Then, human review and independent verification are a part of each search, so no automated decision-making is relied upon. Investigators will look through the publically available search results, verify the matches, and use them as leads.

Facial recognition technology using an open source database has the ability to save countless children from trafficking and exploitation—I've seen this first hand. However, limiting the

database to only MVA images and mug shots will significantly impair the power of this technology to save children. Using a database that uses publically available images is critical.

Thank you for your time.

Detective Chris Johnson