



Bedford County Sheriff's Office

Sheriff Michael W. Miller

1345 Falling Creek Road
Bedford, Virginia 24523
www.bedfordcountysheriff.org



April 7, 2022

The Honorable Glenn Youngkin,
Governor of Virginia
P. O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Youngkin:

April is Child Abuse Awareness Month. An important tool for law enforcement in the fight against the abuse and exploitation of children is close to being available to Virginia Law Enforcement Agencies.

The General Assembly recently passed SB 741 which allows law enforcement agencies in the Commonwealth of Virginia to utilize facial recognition technology. The bill sets forth a series of strict requirements and guidelines to ensure that this technology is used responsibly by members of the law enforcement community. On behalf of our agencies, parents across this Commonwealth and our fellow sisters and brethren in law enforcement, we urge you, Governor Youngkin, to sign this bill into law. It will provide law enforcement with a critical investigative tool, but most importantly, it will help bring children back to their families and put more predators behind bars.

Over the past few years, due to the pandemic, children received greater access to the online world. Whether through online learning from home for school, or unsupervised time online while parents and caregivers were working, children became even more vulnerable to being exploited online. As members of the Southern Virginia Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force, we have seen an almost combined 120% increase of complaints from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) alone in 2020 (70% over 2019) and 2021 (30% over 2020), compared to 2019.

Agencies across the Commonwealth are experiencing a continued increase in resignations and retirements, as well as a massive challenge filling vacancies. Resources are low, and those still in the fight have to cover increasing investigations. When a child goes missing or is being actively abused, time is always of the essence and reliable leads that help identify and locate that child must be capitalized on. One resource with a proven record of helping find victims and their perpetrators is facial recognition technology.

Professionalism, Integrity, Commitment



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Facial recognition can allow law enforcement to leverage technology to quickly sort and compare thousands, and sometimes tens of thousands of images in a fraction of the time an investigator would have to spend manually comparing images. This can provide additional leads for investigators to follow-up on, that could identify a sexually exploited child, a missing child, or even an offender. The quicker a child can be identified and located, the sooner they are removed from the abusive situation; the sooner an offender is located, they can be arrested and prevented from further abusing current and future victims.

Predators are always on the cutting edge of technology, and law enforcement is playing catch-up, learning about the new ways criminals use technology to exploit children. Law enforcement needs smart technology, like facial recognition, that will help close the gap. We commend the General Assembly for developing and passing this bill. This will give law enforcement access to an important tool, with appropriate safeguards to protect citizens' rights. With April being Child Abuse Prevention Month, we could not think of a more opportune time for you to sign SB 741 into law to provide a lifeline to exploited children and keep others safe.

Sincerely,

Sheriff Mike Miller

Supported by:

Sheriff Josh Wyche, Southampton County Sheriff's Office
Sheriff Jeff B. Edds, Scott County Sheriff's Office
Sheriff C.A. Giles, King George Sheriff's Office
Sheriff Darrell W. Warren Jr., Gloucester Sheriff's Office
Sheriff Lloyd T.N. Craddock, Craig County Sheriff's Office
Sheriff Brian K. Roberts, Brunswick County Sheriff's Office
Chief Thomas M. Fowler, Hampden-Sydney College Police Department
Chief E. Jay Spiva, BWXT Police Department
Chief William Wilkerson, Central Virginia Community College Police Department
Sheriff Winston W. Clark, III, Campbell County Sheriff's Office
Chief Dennis N. Russell, Wintergreen Police Department
Sheriff Donald D. Simpson, Appomattox County Sheriff's Office
Administrator Joshua L. Salmon, Blue Ridge Regional Jail
Sheriff Donald T. Sloan, Lynchburg Sheriff's Office
Sheriff E.W. Viar Jr, Amherst County Sheriff's Office
Sheriff Charles W. Foster, Wythe County Sheriff's Office

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Sheriff Eric Hess, Fluvanna County Sheriff's Office
Sheriff Mike Taylor, Pittsylvania County Sheriff's Office
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Sheriff Richard Vaughan, Grayson County Sheriff's Office
Sheriff Charles H. Partin, Montgomery County Sheriff's Office
Jerry Townsend, Superintendent, Piedmont Regional Jail Authority