



**Proponent Testimony- House Public Safety Committee
HB 217— Enact The FIND Act
June 17th, 2025**

Chair Abrams, Vice Chair Miller, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of House Bill 217, the *Finding and Identifying with NamUs Data (FIND) Act*.

My name is **Paula Haines**, and I serve as the CEO of **Freedom a la Cart**, a Columbus-based nonprofit that supports survivors of human trafficking through workforce development, wraparound services, and long-term support. Each day, we walk alongside women who have experienced profound trauma. Many of them were once *missing girls*—unnoticed, unprotected, unheard—and deeply vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking.

House Bill 217 is a vital step forward in how our state identifies and recovers missing persons. Requiring law enforcement to enter missing persons data into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) within 30 days will strengthen coordination across jurisdictions, improve investigative outcomes, and—most importantly—give families a better chance of finding their loved ones.

We know the majority of missing youth are runaways. In 2023, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children reported that **91% of missing children were endangered runaways**. The Polaris Project, which operates the National Human Trafficking Hotline, has found that traffickers often make contact with runaway youth **within days**—quickly exploiting their vulnerabilities. The window is very short before the coercion begins.

Let me tell you about someone we served at Freedom. She left an unstable home as a teen and was never reported missing. She met an older man who gave her attention, food and a place to sleep — and later coerced her into commercial sex. She remained under his control for years. No missing person report. No coordinated search. No data entered.

Her story is not the exception—it's one of many.

Every delay in entering missing person data into NamUs is time lost. It's another child left invisible. Survivors often go unidentified for weeks or months—sometimes, forever. That is unacceptable.

Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances strongly supports H.B. 217 because it brings compassion, urgency, and coordination to our missing persons response. It helps ensure that *every child, every young adult, every person* reported missing in Ohio is not only counted—but sought, seen, and supported.

We're grateful to Representatives **Cockley** and **Ritter** for their leadership on this bill, and to the committee for your thoughtful consideration.

Thank you, and I would be honored to answer any questions.