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H.B. 217
(1_136_0545-6)
136th General Assembly

Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

[Click here for H.B. 217's Bill Analysis](#)

Version: In House Public Safety

Primary Sponsors: Reps. Cockley and Ritter

Local Impact Statement Procedure Required: Yes

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Highlights

- Law enforcement agencies will experience an increase in workload and administrative costs to manually enter and later remove information from reports of missing children and adults into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs). Without automation through the Law Enforcement Automated Data System (LEADS) and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), these increases may be significant for some agencies, particularly large metropolitan police divisions with a large volume of missing persons reports. It is unclear how many agencies can absorb the work utilizing existing staff and resources.
- The initial cost for the Attorney General's Office to establish and maintain digitalized records of missing persons and children reports is likely to be minimal if these records can be added into the Bureau of Criminal Investigation's existing records management system. Law enforcement may incur costs related to the digitalization of records to submit to the Attorney General.
- The bill may also result in minimal one-time costs for the Attorney General to update and publish a best practices protocol and for law enforcement agencies to update policies and procedures related to missing persons cases and records.

Detailed Analysis

NamUs

The bill expands current requirements for law enforcement concerning reports of missing children and adults. It requires law enforcement agencies to enter information from a missing child report into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) if the missing child is not located within 30 days following the making of the report. Similarly, information from

a missing person report for an adult must be made available through NamUs if they are not located within 30 days. The bill also requires law enforcement to update NamUs when a missing child or adult has been found. NamUs is a national centralized repository and resource center for missing, unidentified, and unclaimed person cases across the United States.

The bill's new requirements appear to partly mirror those under federal law. Under federal law, a law enforcement agency that submits a missing child report to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) also must submit the missing child report to NamUs. Federal law requires the U.S. Department of Justice, which administers NamUs, to facilitate data sharing between NCIC and the NamUs databases with respect to missing and unidentified persons. To date, this data sharing linkage has not been implemented. Ohio law does require information contained in an initial report to be submitted to NCIC immediately for children and adults under 21, and within either seven or 30 days for adults 21 and older. Reporting to NamUs would be an additional duty under the bill. Presumably, once the data linkage between the two systems is completed, some of the administrative burdens will be lessened.

Fiscal effects

The bill will increase administrative work related to missing persons cases for law enforcement agencies to enter, update, and remove information from the NamUs database. According to subject matter experts, without an automated transfer of information, the bill will require law enforcement to manually duplicate data entry from NCIC into NamUs. For those agencies that are not already entering information into NamUs, this new process will reportedly require additional personnel time, potentially affecting the allocation of resources. It is unclear how many agencies can absorb the work utilizing existing staff and resources.

The precise impact will vary by factors such as jurisdiction size, staffing levels, and the volume of cases handled, however, it may be significant for some agencies. For large metropolitan police divisions that receive a large volume of missing person reports in particular, the manual process could notably increase administrative workload for their staff. For example, the Columbus Division of Police typically receives over 300 missing persons reports each month.

While the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) can assist agencies with this work, upon request, the Ohio Attorney General's Office (AGO) notes that NamUs still requires local agencies to provide written permission to publish each entry, which adds to ongoing administrative tasks and procedural complexities.

Search warrants – high-risk missing child and missing person

Under current law, for law enforcement to access personal records, they must obtain a search warrant. However, in most cases, judges cannot issue a warrant unless there is probable cause that a crime has been committed. Therefore, in cases with no immediate evidence of a criminal act or foul play, law enforcement has no avenue to obtain certain records to assist in locating the missing person.

The bill addresses this issue by providing a rebuttable presumption that individuals meeting its criteria of a high-risk missing child or person are missing as a result of, or in association with, criminal activity. This presumption would, in effect, authorize a search warrant to be issued by constituting probable cause. If the investigating agency has reason to believe the missing individual is high risk, as defined by the bill, the agency would be required to contact the

appropriate county prosecutor to make a determination of the high-risk designation (see the [Substitute Bill Comparative Synopsis \(PDF\)](#) for the criteria).

For law enforcement agencies that experience challenges in obtaining search warrants in these circumstances, these provisions will increase efficiency and add to existing investigation methods. For prosecutors, making high-risk determinations is not expected to significantly add to their existing workload. Under current practice, prosecutors often are already consulted by law enforcement before seeking a search warrant, which involves reviewing evidence to advise whether probable cause exists. Presumably, high-risk determinations would be absorbed into this existing work.

BCI digitalized records

The bill requires BCI to establish and maintain digitalized records of missing persons and children reports. The bill also requires law enforcement agencies to retain all reports of missing children and missing persons in an electronic format prior to destruction of any paper reports and, upon conversion, to promptly submit those reports directly to BCI. According to the [Ohio Missing Persons Working Group Report \(PDF\)](#),¹ the process of digitizing could be burdensome for some local law enforcement agencies. Costs would only be incurred however, once the agency marks the record for destruction. The magnitude of these costs would vary based on the agency's current recordkeeping protocols. BCI will likely retain these scanned records by adding them into their existing records management system which will pose minimal costs.

Attorney General's best practices protocol

Under current law, the Attorney General is required to publish and distribute to all law enforcement agencies a best practices protocol for addressing reports of missing persons in the state. The bill further states that this protocol must include practices for making assessments of whether a missing person is a high-risk missing person. Upon receipt of the best practices protocol, each law enforcement agency in the state is required to develop and adopt a written policy establishing a procedure for retaining all reports of missing persons in an electronic format prior to the destruction of any paper reports and, upon conversion, for promptly submitting those electronic reports directly to BCI described above under "**BCI digitalized records.**" The bill also requires the best practices protocol to include the bill's NamUs requirements. As a result, law enforcement agencies may incur minimal one-time costs to update policies and procedures related to missing persons cases and records.

Synopsis of Fiscal Effect Changes

- The current substitute bill (I_136_0545-6) reduces the cost for the Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI) by requiring BCI to establish and maintain digitalized records of missing persons and children reports instead of an electronic database for reports of missing persons and children. BCI expects to retain these records by adding them into its existing records management system, which would pose minimal costs. The Ohio Attorney General's Office (AGO) expected initial costs of a database to range between \$15,000 and

¹ See the [Ohio Missing Persons Working Group Report \(PDF\)](#), which is available under "June 2025" Agency Reports Submitted to the General Assembly on LSC's website: lsc.ohio.gov/publications/monthly-agency-reports.

\$20,000, with ongoing annual maintenance costs of \$10,000 to \$15,000 assuming moderate system complexity and the ability to leverage existing platforms or infrastructure.

- The previous version of the bill (I_136_0545-4) required law enforcement agencies to retain electronic reports of missing persons and children prior to the destruction of paper reports and submit electronic reports to BCI. Additionally, it specified that the Attorney General's best practices protocol must include processes for making high-risk assessments and requires law enforcement agencies to adopt policies for electronic record retention and submission. The current substitute bill (I_136_0545-6) maintains these provisions but specifies the electronic reports be submitted directly to BCI instead of a database maintained by BCI. Under both versions of the bill, the provisions related to electronic record retention will pose an administrative burden on law enforcement depending on current records retention schedules and the extent to which the agency digitizes paper records.
- The current substitute bill (I_136_0545-6) eliminates the previous version of the bill's provision related to release of records. Under the previous bill (I_136_0545-4), courts of common pleas were permitted to release any records pertaining to a high-risk missing child that are obtained by an investigating law enforcement agency to a governmental entity upon showing of good cause by the governmental entity. As a result, courts would have experienced increased administrative costs to respond to additional records requests, with associated work depending on the number and type of records impacted.
- The current substitute bill (I_136_0545-6) makes various changes regarding the timing of missing child entry into NamUs and determinations of high-risk missing child and person designations. The related fiscal effect of these changes is minimal.