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California State Senate

SENATOR
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Senate Select Committee on Missing and Unidentified Persons

Opening Statement- Senator Cathleen Galgiani

Wednesday, March 11, 2020

State Capitol, Room 3191

1:00 p.m.

Our society, country, state, and local governments recognize the value of each person that exists, and lives within its borders. Our United States of America Constitution codified the rights recognized due to each person.

It is with these thoughts that we also consider the silent persons, those who constitute the missing, and not accounted for. In addressing missing persons investigations the California Police Officer and Training (POST) manual starts out by advising, "investigating a missing person case can be one of the most challenging assignments you will handle in your career."

To find missing persons unharmed and not injured is the best of outcomes for missing persons. Once reunited with their families, they can begin recovery. In some cases, the victim is recovered deceased. While hard to imagine, caring for the deceased victim, providing a peaceful resting place and knowing where they are is of some consolation to the victim's loved ones. In the worst of cases, the victim remains missing and is never located alive, or deceased.

It is our duty to insure that we provide best practices and tools to enable law enforcement to locate missing victims. It is in this spirit that we begin today's hearing. We must insure that we acknowledge the latest developments in investigative technology and make them a part of our current efforts.

Understanding how the use of various databases to hold descriptor information of missing persons is a key first step. It is my understanding that submitting missing person information is not required for all of them. Should submission of missing person's descriptors, as provided in at least eight other states, be legally mandated, is an open question.

We must also insure that our practices are always incorporating the newest and most promising developments and that we provide for advancement of missing person's investigation to incorporate the benefit of time and technology.

In 2018 alone, there were 39,954 reported adults missing and 79,913 children reported missing. That is certainly a lot of work for our law enforcement agencies – taking down information, following-up and managing a great deal of data.

Thousands of California's Missing Person cases are now older "cold cases." Complicating these investigations is the fact that often times, the individual is originally from one county, but disappears, or their body is found in another county. In many cases, multiple counties are involved, and the investigating agency is outside of the county in which the individual lived.

These issues present many confusing challenges for family members and friends who are hesitant to contact law enforcement, or uncertain as to when they should call with new information or potential leads. In addition, many are unfamiliar with jurisdictional issues between law enforcement agencies, and at the same time, they are coping with the loss of their loved ones, and trying to take care of legal matters, custody issues for children who are left behind, insurance, etc.

Today, we will hear first-hand, accounts from the people who take the initial reports to the people who deal with the various databases where information is deposited. We will also hear from the people who help to analyze this data to look for patterns and provide local law enforcement with needed assistance.

I look forward to a robust discussion this afternoon, and I appreciate our guest panelists who have agreed to take some time to speak about this issue. I look forward to hearing your perspectives on this issue and come to a better understanding where we can improve our efforts. With that said, I would like to

see if any members of the committee would like to add any comments. Thank you. Let us begin.