

119TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 6998

To enhance hiring authorities at the Department of Homeland Security,
and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 9, 2026

Ms. LEE of Florida (for herself and Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) introduced
the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

A BILL

To enhance hiring authorities at the Department of
Homeland Security, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Renewed Hope Act”.

5 **SEC. 2. IMAGE AUDIO FORENSICS HIRING AND TRAINING**

6 **PROGRAMS AT THE DEPARTMENT OF HOME-**

7 **LAND SECURITY.**

8 (a) **ADDITIONAL PERSONNEL.**—The Secretary of
9 Homeland Security shall hire, train, and assign not fewer
10 than—

1 (1) 40 forensics analysts to the Victim Identi-
2 fication Laboratory of the Child Exploitation Inves-
3 tigations Unit of Homeland Security Investigations;

4 (2) 30 child exploitation investigators to the
5 Victim Identification Laboratory of the Child Exploi-
6 tation Investigations Unit of Homeland Security In-
7 vestigations; and

8 (3) 130 additional forensics analysts and child
9 exploitation investigators to support identification
10 and rescue of victims of child sexual exploitation and
11 abuse at Homeland Security Investigations offices of
12 the Special Agent in Charge.

13 (b) PROHIBITION ON REASSIGNMENT OF POSI-
14 TIONS.—

15 (1) IN GENERAL.—A position created under
16 subsection (a) may not be reassigned to another
17 component of the Department of Homeland Security
18 that is outside of the Child Exploitation Investiga-
19 tions Unit of Homeland Security Investigations or
20 the offices of the Special Agent in Charge of Home-
21 land Security Investigations, as applicable.

22 (2) REASSIGNMENT OF EMPLOYEES.—An em-
23 ployee serving in a position created under subsection
24 (a) may be reassigned to another component of the
25 Department of Homeland Security that is outside of

1 the Child Exploitation Investigations Unit of Home-
2 land Security Investigations or the offices of the
3 Special Agent in Charge of Homeland Security In-
4 vestigations only if the employee elects to be so reas-
5 signed.

6 (c) EMPLOYMENT OF EXPERTS AND CONSULT-
7 ANTS.—Section 890A of the Homeland Security Act of
8 2002 (6 U.S.C. 473) is amended—

9 (1) by redesignating subsection (g) as sub-
10 section (i); and

11 (2) by inserting after subsection (f) the fol-
12 lowing:

13 “(g) EMPLOYMENT OF EXPERTS AND CONSULT-
14 ANTS.—

15 “(1) IN GENERAL.—In accordance with section
16 3109 of title 5, United States Code, at daily rates
17 not to exceed the equivalent rate prescribed for
18 grade GS–15 of the General Schedule under section
19 5332 of such title, the Secretary may procure by
20 contract the temporary (not in excess of 1 year) or
21 intermittent services of experts or consultants to
22 provide image and audio forensic analysis related to
23 victim identification to support efforts to identify, lo-
24 cate, and rescue children seen in videos images and
25 videos of sexual exploitation and abuse.

1 “(2) PLACEMENT.—The Secretary shall pro-
2 mulgate guidelines for assigning or detailing partici-
3 pants to positions at the Center, offices of the Spe-
4 cial Agent in Charge, offices of the Resident Agent
5 in Charge, and Attaché offices.”.

6 **SEC. 3. DECONFLICTION OF CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**
7 **AND ABUSE INVESTIGATIONS WITHIN THE**
8 **DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY.**

9 Section 890A(a) of the Homeland Security Act of
10 2002 (6 U.S.C. 473(a)) is amended by inserting after
11 paragraph (2) the following:

12 “(3) COORDINATION.—The Secretary shall,
13 with the concurrence of the directors of affected
14 agencies within the Department, establish joint pro-
15 cedures to deconflict, coordinate, and synchronize
16 child sexual exploitation investigations with the Cen-
17 ter.

18 “(4) NCMEC COORDINATION.—The Center
19 may establish joint procedures with the National
20 Center for Missing and Exploited Children to
21 deconflict, coordinate, and synchronize child sexual
22 exploitation investigations with the Child Victim
23 Identification Program of the National Center for
24 Missing and Exploited Children.”.

1 **SEC. 4. VICTIM IDENTIFICATION TRAINING PROGRAM.**

2 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Homeland Secu-
3 rity shall establish a Victim Identification Training Pro-
4 gram (referred to in this section as the “Program”) in
5 the Cyber Crimes Center.

6 (b) PROGRAM.—The Program shall provide training
7 used to identify victims of sexual exploitation and abuse
8 to—

9 (1) Homeland Security Investigations per-
10 sonnel;

11 (2) Federal, State, local, Tribal, and foreign
12 law enforcement agency personnel engaged in the in-
13 vestigation of crimes of child sexual exploitation and
14 abuse within their respective jurisdictions;

15 (3) Civil service organizations engaged in the
16 prevention of child sexual exploitation and the iden-
17 tification of abuse victims; and

18 (4) The National Center for Missing and Ex-
19 ploited Children.

20 (c) FUNCTIONS.—The functions of the Program shall
21 include—

22 (1) annual training for participants focused
23 on—

24 (A) training on the most current tools and
25 techniques used in victim identification; and

1 (B) training on the capabilities of the Vic-
2 tim Identification Laboratory; and

3 (2) increasing personnel knowledge on how to
4 conduct image, audio, and video enhancements.

5 **SEC. 5. DIRECT HIRE AUTHORITY FOR HOMELAND SECU-**
6 **RITY INVESTIGATIONS.**

7 (a) DIRECT HIRE.—

8 (1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in para-
9 graph (2), the head of Homeland Security Investiga-
10 tions may appoint, without regard to the provisions
11 of subchapter I of chapter 33 (other than sections
12 3303 and 3328 of such chapter) of title 5, United
13 States Code, qualified candidates to the positions de-
14 scribed in section 2(a).

15 (2) LIMITATION.—The authority under para-
16 graph (1) shall not be available to the head if, dur-
17 ing any period, at least 97 percent of such positions
18 are occupied.

19 (b) REPORTS.—Not later than 1 year after the date
20 of the enactment of this Act and for each of the 4 fol-
21 lowing years, the head of Homeland Security Investiga-
22 tions shall submit a report to the Committee on the Judi-
23 ciary and the Committee on Oversight and Accountability
24 of the House of Representatives, the Committee on the
25 Judiciary and the Committee on Homeland Security and

1 Governmental Affairs of the Senate, and any other rel-
2 evant congressional committee of jurisdiction. Each such
3 report shall include the following:

4 (1) The total number of individuals appointed
5 by the head under this section during the preceding
6 year.

7 (2) How the direct hiring authority under this
8 section is being used by the head.

9 **SEC. 6. APPLICATION.**

10 The requirements of each of sections 2 through 4 of
11 this Act, and any amendment made by such sections, shall
12 be carried out not later than the date that is 3 years after
13 the date of the enactment of this Act.

14 **SEC. 7. PRIVACY PROTECTIONS FOR VICTIMS.**

15 (a) IN GENERAL.—A covered person shall—

16 (1) keep all identifying information and docu-
17 ments concerning a victim of child sexual exploi-
18 tation or abuse in a secure place to which only indi-
19 viduals working to identify and rescue victims of
20 child sexual exploitation or abuse have access; and

21 (2) not disclose or use any information or docu-
22 ments concerning a victim of child sexual exploi-
23 tation or abuse other than for the purposes of—

24 (A) investigating or prosecuting individuals
25 for crimes of child sexual exploitation or abuse;

1 (B) connecting victims—

2 (i) to licensed and trained trauma in-
3 formed medical professions; or

4 (ii) with Federal resources available
5 through the Office of Victims of Crime at
6 the Department of Justice;

7 (C) complying with any mandatory victim
8 reporting requirements; or

9 (D) sharing information with other law en-
10 forcement personnel for the purpose of inves-
11 tigating or prosecuting individuals for crimes of
12 child sexual exploitation or abuse.

13 (b) COVERED PERSON DEFINED.—In this section,
14 the term “covered person” means—

15 (1) any Federal, State, or local law enforcement
16 officer; or

17 (2) any other personnel of the Department of
18 Homeland Security,

19 working in, employed by, or detailed to the Child Exploi-
20 tation Investigations Unit of Homeland Security Inves-
21 tigation or to the offices of the Special Agent in Charge
22 of Homeland Security Investigations.

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