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Office

H.B. 217
136th General Assembly

Fiscal Note & Local Impact Statement

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Version: As Introduced

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 information from reports of missing children and adults into the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) and then manually remove information for persons who are found. 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 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.

Detailed Analysis

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 child is not located within 30 days of receiving 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 of receiving the report. The bill also requires law enforcement to update NamUs when a missing child or adult, whose information was integrated into the database, was found. Furthermore, it requires that the best practices protocol that is published and distributed by the Attorney General include these NamUs requirements.

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 Identification (BCI) can assist agencies with this work, upon request, the Ohio Attorney General's Office notes that NamUs still requires local agencies to provide written permission to publish each entry, which adds to ongoing administrative tasks and procedural complexities. The Office will need to update its current best practices protocol which is currently made available to law enforcement.

Law enforcement agencies may also incur minimal one-time costs to update policies and procedures related to missing persons cases.