



## MISSING PERSONS: ESSENTIAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS IN RECOGNITION OF NATIONAL MISSING CHILDREN'S DAY – MAY 25<sup>th</sup>

National Missing Children's Day, observed each year on May 25<sup>th</sup>, is a timely reminder that every law enforcement agency must be prepared to respond immediately, consistently, and comprehensively when a child or other person is reported missing. National recognition of this day underscores the importance of child safety, rapid response, and strong interagency coordination in locating missing children and supporting affected families.

For the chief of police, a robust missing persons policy is not merely an administrative requirement; it is a critical operational safeguard. A clear, written directive helps ensure that reports are accepted without delay, that officers understand investigative priorities and supervisory responsibilities, that high-risk cases are identified early, and that appropriate notifications, database entries, family support, and follow-up actions occur without inconsistency or avoidable delay. In addition to operational risk, agencies that lack clear policy guidance or fail to adhere to established missing persons requirements may increase their exposure to litigation arising from delayed, incomplete, or noncompliant investigative responses.

A strong policy is especially important because runaway and missing youth are often among the most vulnerable individuals encountered by law enforcement. Research has consistently recognized that runaway and missing youth face elevated risk of human trafficking, exploitation, and repeated victimization, and that many are also affected by trauma, abuse, neglect, family instability, or exposure to domestic violence, all of which can complicate recovery and require a victim-centered response.<sup>1,2</sup>

To further support agencies in strengthening their response capabilities, a sample Missing and Unidentified Persons Policy is now available, developed to meet and exceed accreditation standards and align with recognized national best practices for prompt reporting, risk assessment, investigation, supervisory oversight, notifications, interagency coordination, family communication, and a supportive, trauma-responsive approach.

Chiefs of police are encouraged to review, adopt, and implement the sample policy to ensure agency directives reflect current legal requirements, operational realities, and the heightened risks facing runaway youth, missing and exploited children, and adults. A comprehensive missing persons policy strengthens investigative responses, helps protect youth and vulnerable adults, supports a public safety strategy focused on early identification of youth vulnerability and intervention, and builds upon an upstream, forward-thinking crime prevention strategy.

The sample policy includes, at a minimum, the following key components:

- Definitions for key terms, including high-risk missing person, runaway, and throwaway.
- Guidance regarding Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (VICAP) usage, as appropriate.
- National Crime Information Center (NCIC) entry, update, confirmation, and related procedural requirements.
- Initial response and search considerations, including references to the Incident Command System.
- Supervisor responsibilities for review, oversight, and coordination.
- Investigative standards to promote thorough, timely, and consistent case handling.

- Missing juvenile return verification procedures, including the use of a standardized form to identify indicators of abuse and prior trauma and to help prevent re-victimization, when applicable.
- Parent or guardian interview procedures following the return of a missing juvenile including the use of a standardized form to identify trusted adults in the child's life and connect the family with appropriate support resources.
- DNA collection procedures when authorized and appropriate.
- Amber Alert and Silver Alert notification procedures, together with other mass notification platforms, when applicable.
- Recognition of the Universal Hand Signal for Help and guidance on officer awareness, response, and documentation when such an indicator is observed or reported.
- Code Adam procedures and related agency response protocols to assist in locating lost or missing children in public facilities and during special events.
- References to the Safe Haven Infant Protection Act.

The sample Missing Persons Policy is now available in the [Law Enforcement Accreditation Plus Portal](#).

#### Additional Considerations for the Chief of Police:

- Review the [Missing Kids Readiness Program](#) and utilize the sample Missing and Unidentified Persons Policy in striving to become a recognized Missing Kids Readiness Program agency. The program promotes best practices for responding to missing, abducted, and sexually exploited children. Agencies that meet the required training and policy standards may be recognized by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, demonstrating preparedness and reinforcing public confidence in the agency's commitment to child safety.
- Review the [National Missing Children's Day Resource Page](#), supported by the U.S. Department of Justice, for additional information and action planning.
- Review the Library Safe Child Model Policy available in [MSI Model Policies](#), which addresses missing child considerations, and confer with local library leadership regarding its implementation.

Please contact your Law Enforcement Risk Control Consultant with any questions or if you need assistance in accessing the Law Enforcement Accreditation Plus Portal.

<sup>1</sup>Abducted Children (March 2025); Polaris, Myths, Facts, and Statistics.

<sup>2</sup>AMBER Advocate, Rethinking Runaways and Missing Children.