EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2008, Congress took important steps to address online sexual exploitation and abuse of children (OSEAC) issues by passing the PROTECT Our Children Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-401), which provided the groundwork for the U.S. Government response to OSEAC. The bill authorized the Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) task forces, established a Special Counsel for Child Exploitation Prevention and Interdiction in the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) Office of the Deputy Attorney General and directed DOJ to publish an annual National Strategy for Child Exploitation Prevention and Interdiction, among other provisions to strengthen enforcement efforts. Unfortunately, this bill has only been partially implemented, as reported in the New York Times investigative series published in September 2019. Meanwhile, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) CyberTipline has received more than 86 million reports of suspected child sexual exploitation since 1998 when it was established. In the last year alone, NCMEC received 21.7 million reports, up 28 percent from 16.9 million reports in 2019.

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RECOMMENDATION 1: ADVOCATE FOR INCREASED APPROPRIATIONS

The programs within the Missing and Exploited Children programs funding all require more resources to deal with how quickly OSEAC issues are increasing. The two largest programs within this funding stream—NCMEC and the ICACs—rely on each other. As the number of reports to NCMEC’s CyberTipline grows, so do the number of potential investigations that the ICACs need to respond to. Conversely, as the number of investigations that the ICACs conduct increases, the number of victims and survivors that need services also grows. Child advocacy centers (CACs) are also well-placed to provide services to the growing number of victims of OSEAC, though they are already overwhelmed by the current demand for services. Increasing services available through the Missing and Exploited Children programs, as well as increasing the funding available for local CACs that serve victims of OSEAC is critical to any victim-centered and trauma-informed enforcement and response strategy.

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RECOMMENDATION 3:
PRESS THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION TO DESIGNATE A SENIOR OFFICIAL TO OVERSEE THE U.S. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO OSEAC

Lastly, many offices are working towards ending OSEAC within the U.S. Government, but inter-agency coordination on OSEAC issues could be better streamlined. Pressing the Biden Administration to appoint a coordinator within the White House Domestic Policy Council who could elevate the priority of OSEAC issues across the government, as well as coordinate efforts and allocate resources in a whole-of-government approach would be an important step towards catching up with the fast-growing pace of the crime.

"In addition to improving enforcement, the U.S. approach to combating OSEAC needs to also focus on improving services for victims and survivors, as well as prevention programs that address vulnerable populations."