

HB2167
Senate Judiciary
Chief Agent Steven Harstad
Bureau of Criminal Investigation

My name is Steven Harstad and I am a Chief Agent with the Bureau of Criminal Investigation submitting my testimony in support of HB2167. This bill provides essential funding to state and local law enforcement agencies across North Dakota, assisting them with the cost of specialized digital forensics hardware and software. These resources are crucial in investigating a wide range of cases, with a particular focus on combating the growing threat of child exploitation. Many states have a similar legislation including Texas, Virginia, Hawaii and South Dakota.

In our increasingly digital world, technology and online crimes pose significant challenges to law enforcement. HB2167 addresses these challenges head-on by prioritizing digital investigations and utilizing online resources to track offenders. Additionally, this bill emphasizes the importance of public awareness and prevention programs, aiming to educate communities about the risks and dangers lurking online.

The benefits of digital forensics in crime investigations are vast and critical. In today's digital age, much of the evidence and criminal activity occur online or involve electronic devices. Using advanced digital forensics tools, law enforcement can track down offenders, identify victims, and recover vital evidence from devices and online platforms. This technology also enables investigators to uncover hidden or encrypted data, which is often used by criminals to conceal illicit files or communications.

Crucially, HB2167 ensures that digital evidence—such as emails, documents, photos, videos, browser histories, and communication logs—is collected, preserved, and analyzed in a manner that is legally admissible in court. This is essential for maintaining the integrity of investigations and upholding the rule of law. The clear and detailed evidence provided by digital forensics plays a pivotal role in supporting investigations, prosecutions, and convictions, ultimately helping to prove guilt or innocence and providing closure to victims.

It is important to note that the cost of the tools necessary for these investigations continues to rise. HB2167 addresses this issue by placing the burden of supporting these costs on those convicted of crimes that require the use of digital forensics tools. This approach ensures that law enforcement agencies have the resources they need without placing an undue financial burden on taxpayers.

In conclusion, I request your support for HB2167. By providing critical funding for digital forensics and crimes against children, this bill empowers our law enforcement agencies to effectively combat these crimes and protect our communities, especially our children, from exploitation.