Capacity to Report to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System

2026

Maryland Department of State Police

February 2, 2026

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February 2, 2026

The Honorable Wes Moore
Governor
State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Governor Moore:

Please accept this letter as clarification regarding the capacity, role, and operational relationship of the Maryland Department of State Police (MDSP) Missing Person Clearinghouse to the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NAMUS), as requested in your veto letter of **House Bill 1116 – Public Safety – State Clearinghouse for Missing Persons**.

The Maryland State Clearinghouse for Missing Persons serves as the official state-level clearinghouse for collecting, coordinating, and disseminating information on missing persons. This centralized system is operated by the MDSP. The Clearinghouse receives and distributes information and statistics concerning missing persons, facilitating information sharing among law enforcement agencies and other relevant entities within Maryland and nationwide.

The Maryland Clearinghouse is separate and distinct from NAMUS, a national information-sharing system designed to support investigations involving missing persons and unidentified human remains across the United States. It is a free, centralized database that is funded and operated by the U.S. Department of Justice through the National Institute of Justice (NIJ).

While the Maryland Clearinghouse maintains administrative access to NAMUS and may search or enter cases at its discretion, it is essential to acknowledge the system's limitations and intended purpose. NAMUS is federally funded and operated, and its availability and functionality are directly dependent on federal operations and funding decisions. The system is primarily designed to support investigations into cold cases and unidentified human remains, and is most commonly used by coroners, medical examiners, homicide investigators, and cold-case units. As such, its structure and purpose do not align well with the operational realities of routine missing person investigations in Maryland.

MDSP does not routinely enter missing person cases into NAMUS for several key reasons:

1. Jurisdictional Role - MDSP is not the primary law enforcement agency for most missing person cases in Maryland. The majority of cases are initiated and managed by county and

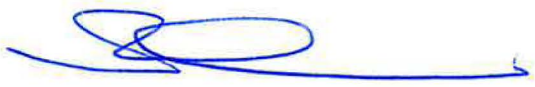
municipal police departments, limiting MDSP's direct involvement in day-to-day case handling.

2. Primary Federal Reporting - MDSP enters missing person information directly into the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) system, utilizing both its online reporting platform and the LOCATOR Poster Program. NCMEC is specifically designed for active, time-sensitive cases and remains the most effective mechanism for rapid public dissemination.
3. Case Resolution Timelines and Resource Constraints - More than 99 percent of routine missing person cases in Maryland are resolved voluntarily within 72 hours. Given this rapid resolution rate, combined with the Clearinghouse's non-24/7 operational status and limited staffing, MDSP does not consistently receive case information in a timeframe that would justify NAMUS entry. Additionally, under current budget constraints, MDSP does not have the personnel capacity to enter, validate, and continuously maintain approximately 11,000 missing person cases annually while ensuring accuracy, ongoing case activity, and consistency with NCIC records.
4. Open Access Nature of NAMUS - NAMUS is an open system. Allied law enforcement agencies, coroners, and members of the public, including families, may independently submit entries. As a result, MDSP is neither the sole nor primary point of data entry for NAMUS.
5. Mismatch with Clearinghouse Case Types - The vast majority of cases handled by the Maryland Clearinghouse do not involve unidentified human remains or cold cases. Consequently, these cases fall outside the primary case use for which NAMUS was designed.
6. Allied Agency Practices - When allied police departments seek assistance from the Maryland Clearinghouse, requests most often involve NCMEC posters or related support. These agencies similarly do not rely on NAMUS for routine missing person investigations.
7. Federal Operational Dependence and System Reliability - Due to NAMUS grant funding and being operated by the U.S. Department of Justice through NIJ, its availability is subject to federal operational status. Notably, in December 2020, the University of North Texas Center for Human Identification (UNTCHI), then responsible for managing NAMUS, announced it could no longer continue operations due to funding reductions and mandated program changes, creating the risk of a system shutdown. Although temporary funding was later secured, these vulnerabilities materialized in 2024 during the 43-day federal government shutdown when NAMUS was not operational. This interruption significantly limited its reliability as a tool for ongoing or time-sensitive investigative support, and further constrained MDSP's ability to rely on NAMUS as a consistent case-management system.

In summary, while the Maryland Department of State Police has the technical capability to access NAMUS, the logistical, operational, and resource realities necessary to rely on the system do not exist. Although accessible, NAMUS is not currently the most effective or appropriate tool for managing routine missing person cases in Maryland.

Should you have any additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact my office by telephone at 410-653-4219 or by email at msp.superintendent@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,



Colonel Michael A. Jackson
Acting Superintendent