

DeWine announces recommendations from the Ohio Missing Persons Working Group

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COLUMBUS, Ohio — Gov. Mike DeWine on Tuesday announced 18 recommendations aimed at improving how law enforcement handles missing persons cases, including improving information sharing between agencies, strengthening communication with families and enhancing professional training.

The [recommendations](#) came from the Ohio Missing Persons Working Group that DeWine created in January to examine the complexity of missing-persons cases, roadblocks encountered by law enforcement and struggles faced by families.

“Thousands of children and adults are reported missing each year. And although most are located quickly, some simply vanish, leaving anguished families behind and adding to law enforcement’s growing caseload,” DeWine said during a news conference in Columbus.

The working group included individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, from law enforcement officials, advocates, family members and educators. Ohio Department of Public Safety Director Andy Wilson chaired the group.

Wilson said testimony from family members significantly influenced the working group’s decisions.

“The efforts of this working group aim to bring some level of relief, justice or closure to those across the state who have experienced the loss associated with a missing family member,” Wilson said.

Proposed changes to Ohio law included stronger penalties for custody interference, codifying Endangered Missing Child Alerts into the Ohio Revised Code, and giving investigators easier access to phone and social media records when a missing person is believed at risk.

Other recommendations centered on easing the burdens faced by the families of missing persons. This included providing families with easier access to resources,

improving communication with law enforcement, and engaging advocates to support families of children who repeatedly disappear.

In light of the recommendations, DeWine has ordered multiple state agencies to begin implementing the recommendations.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- The Ohio State Highway Patrol automating notifications to law enforcement agencies for Endangered Missing Child Alerts
- The Ohio Collaborative Community-Police Advisory Board creating best practices for how law enforcement interacts with families of missing persons
- The Office of Criminal Justice Services expanding the Ohio Prisoner Extradition Reimbursement Program to include interference with custody cases.

DeWine also said he is contacting the U.S. attorney general's office to address deficiencies in data sharing between local, state and federal databases.

"There's very specific things in here that we know will make a difference," DeWine said. "This doesn't mean that every person that's missing will be found. What it does mean is that if we do these things, we're going to improve the situation rather dramatically."

Further recommendations were made to the Ohio attorney general's Bureau of Criminal Investigation, or BCI. Those suggested included establishing a central repository of resources for families and investigators, the launch of an annual missing person conferences, forum where law enforcement can discuss investigative techniques and review cases.

Regarding the release of the working group's recommendations, Attorney General Dave Yost said in a statement, "Although we had a representative present at these meetings, we did not see the recommendations until the Tuesday morning of the Governor's press conference. We will take some time to digest them and respond thoughtfully."