

IBIA Expresses Disappointment on Enactment of Florida Law Prohibiting Use of Biometrics in Schools

May 15, 2014 – The International Biometrics & Identification Association (IBIA) expresses its deep disappointment that Florida Governor Rick Scott has signed a bill (SB 188) that prohibits the collection of student biometric information in K-12 schools in the state of Florida. IBIA had testified in legislative hearings in opposition to the bill and had urged Gov. Scott to veto the bill upon its passage. “This legislation prevents Florida’s public schools from realizing the many benefits that biometrics can provide to student safety and security as well as enhanced productivity of school operations,” said Robert Harbour, IBIA’s Chairman.

IBIA believes this law is a misguided attempt to protect student privacy and sets a bad precedent by broadly prohibiting the use of an innovative and beneficial technology. In today’s world, virtually everything depends on knowing with a high degree of assurance ‘who’ we are dealing with. This is especially important in our schools where children, our most vulnerable population, spend most of their days. For many critical purposes – foremost, the security, safety, and privacy of our children but also the productivity and the efficiency of our schools – we need to identify with a high degree of assurance ‘who’ is entering our schools, using school facilities, attending classes, eating school lunches.

Biometric identification, based on an individual’s unique physical attributes, is the only way to positively identify an individual. Other means of identification – cards, PINS, passwords, visual inspection of students – are ineffective. Cards can be lost or stolen or shared; ID numbers and passwords are easily forgotten, especially for younger students. As for relying on visually looking at students, no one can remember all the students that come and go in a school.

Concern about the theft of biometric information, because it represents a permanent feature of a person, is based on misinformation. Biometric information is protected even if it cannot be reset or changed. Biometric data is typically stored in the form of a template, a mathematical representation of features used only for matching purposes. Theft of a biometric template only yields a meaningless string of numbers with no context or value to a hacker.

Biometric technology has been used for student ID in thousands of K-12 school districts across the country for almost 15 years. It has proven to be a faster, safer, and more cost-effective solution than other methods of identification - especially with today’s security concerns and reporting requirements.

A key driver for biometrics is the school cafeteria. Accurate records are critical for reimbursement from the federal government’s \$13 billion free and reduced lunch and breakfast programs. Speed and efficiency are essential so that students have enough time to eat. With cafeteria lines moving faster, there is greater student participation that results in better nutrition for students and increased federal funding to school districts. Biometrics are used in other school areas, as well, for example, access at school entrances, attendance checking, the library, the nurse’s office, and the bus.

It is vitally important to separate fact from emotion and misinformation. IBIA supports best practices for the responsible use of biometric technology, including parental notice, informed consent, and data protection and deletion.

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