

# alzheimer's association

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Good morning Senator Prague, Representative Serra, and distinguished members of the Select Committee on Aging. My name is Christy Kovel and I am the Senior Director of Public Policy and Communication for the Connecticut Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association.

I am here today to testify in support of **Raised Bill No. 451, An Act Establishing a Silver Alert System.**

The Alzheimer's Association is a donor supported, non-profit organization serving the needs of families, health care professionals, and those individuals who are affected with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias. The Association provides information and resources, support groups, education and training, and a 24 hour, 7 Day a week Helpline.

An estimated 5.2 million Americans currently are living with Alzheimer's disease, and this number is expected to grow to as many as 16 million by 2050. In Connecticut, nearly 70,000 residents have Alzheimer's or a related dementia, and over 112,000 people are caring for them.

Six out of 10 people with Alzheimer's disease will wander from their homes or care giving facilities at some point as the disease progresses. Even in one's own neighborhood or a familiar place, a person with Alzheimer's disease may become disoriented and lost. Most people with Alzheimer's disease who wander are found within 1.5 miles of home, and 50 percent of individuals who wander risk serious injury or death if not found within the first 24 hours. Exposure and other environmental dangers pose serious threats to people with Alzheimer's disease because they may lose their cognitive ability to remember when to eat and drink and the ability to protect themselves from extreme weather. For these reasons, a timely local search response to a wandering incident is crucial.

- Not require official proof of diagnosis, instead require a caregiver statement that the person has dementia.
- Use a tiered approach to alert issuance. Most adult wanderers are found within 1.5 miles of home, therefore issuing an alert should not automatically trigger use of statewide highway signs; instead the program should emphasize local searching first, only escalating to regional or statewide if evidence suggests a person has left the immediate area (i.e., in a car or by public transportation).
- Allow local searching to begin immediately upon receiving report of the disappearance.
- Mandate and appropriate funding for first responder training with dementia specific search techniques and strategies.
- Collect data on Silver Alert usage and regularly evaluate program operation. As Silver Alert is an emerging program, this effort can improve the functionality of a state's program and guide any new states that implement Silver Alert.
- Support interoperability and communication with the existing Medic Alert® + Safe Return® program.
- Include a mechanism to enroll individuals in Medic Alert® + Safe Return®.

### **MedicAlert® + Safe Return® Program**

Silver Alerts can enhance existing successful programs, such as Medic Alert® + Safe Return®. The Alzheimer's Association's Safe Return® program began in 1993 as a nationwide identification, support and enrollment program which provided assistance when a person with Alzheimer's or a related dementia wandered (either locally or far from home).

In 2007, Medic Alert® and Safe Return ® joined forces to create MedicAlert® + Safe Return®. For over 50 years, MedicAlert® has protected and saved lives by providing identification and medical information in emergencies. Through this alliance, MedicAlert® + Safe Return® increased its outreach and awareness efforts to proactively protect its 160,000 enrollees and facilitate over 16,000 reunions.