

STATE OF CONNECTICUT



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY  
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

*James M. Thomas  
Commissioner*

*Lieutenant Edwin S. Henion  
Chief of Staff*

February 15, 2011

Rep. Stephen Dargan, Co-Chairman  
Sen. Joan Hartley, Co-Chairman  
Public Safety and Security Committee  
Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, CT 06106

**SB 765 AN ACT CONCERNING EMERGENCY ALERTS FOR ABDUCTED OR MISSING CHILDREN**

**The Department of Public Safety opposes this bill.**

The proposed language in SB 765 does not meet the State or National criteria for issuing an AMBER Alert. In particular, the language about runaways is in direct conflict with the provisions of the Amber Alert governing document.

This proposed bill would also prohibit law enforcement agencies from requesting, broadcasting or disseminating an amber alert in the case of a parental abduction. There has been a growing tide whereby parental abductions now outnumber stranger abductions nationally and the chance of an outcome that places the child in immediate danger of injury or death is unfortunately very real.

The AMBER Alert Program is a voluntary partnership between the Department of Public Safety, The Connecticut Police Chief's Association, the Department of Transportation, and the Connecticut Broadcasters Association. It is designed to activate an urgent bulletin in the most serious child-abduction cases. The goal of an AMBER Alert is to instantly galvanize the entire community to assist in the search for and the safe recovery of the child.

Connecticut implemented its plan in January 2002 and has had only 10 activations; in each case the child was safely recovered. Public Law 108-21 of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Protect Act, established the National coordination of the AMBER Alert communications network and set the minimum standards for issuance and dissemination of alerts through the AMBER Alert communications network. Connecticut's AMBER Alert plan was developed by its voluntary partners and meets the standards established by the Department of Justice, in accordance with PL 108-21.

In order for an AMBER Alert to be issued, the abducted child must be under 18 years of age, unless there are special circumstances as proven mental or physical disability. Law enforcement must believe the circumstances surrounding the abduction indicate that the child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death. There must be enough descriptive information to believe a broadcast will help, and the information must be received in a timely manner.

The proposed language in SB 765 does not meet the State or National criteria for issuing an AMBER Alert. The intent of the bill could be addressed in ways other that would not endanger the effectiveness of the Amber Alert program. The Department of Public Safety is working with its partners, through the Connecticut AMBER Alert committee to institute an Endangered Missing Advisory. This will allow an advisory, similar to a Silver Alert, to be issued when a missing person does not meet the criteria for an AMBER Alert or a Silver Alert and the person is believed to be in danger.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James M. Thomas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "T".

James M. Thomas  
COMMISSIONER