

# Margarita V. Torres

## Testimony before the Public Safety and Security Committee

Feb. 6, 2012

Good morning, Chairwoman Hartley, Chairman Dargan and other members on the Committee on Public Safety and Security. My name is Margarita Torres, and I live on 127 Oxford Street in Hartford. I am testifying today as a parent and legal conservator of my son Aaron Torres, on an Act concerning the Silver Alert System.

Improving the Silver Alert System in the State of CT is a very personal issue for me. You see I had a son who at the age of 18 was dual-diagnosed with schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder. He was unable to make rational decisions or care for himself. His illness prevented him from finishing high school, attending college or pursuing an abundance of extracurricular activities that he was fond of. Aaron was a certified scuba diver, and avid snow boarder, and along with the youth church group, he loved taking weekend-long kayaking trips. When he began hearing voices and having hallucinations, he started to self-medicate and by the time his father and I understood his diagnosis, Aaron was unable to come to terms with his illness. He wanted to be just like any other teenager. The disease robbed him of his capacity to enjoy life, and denied him the understanding that if he didn't take his medications, he would not get better. Therefore, on the advice of his physicians, I was granted "Conservatorship of his Person" by the Courts.

Although it was a horrific concept, Aaron's physicians at the State Hospital, the judicial system and I thought it was for his safety. Without proper care, Aaron would be left alone to wander the streets with no food or shelter, and no medication. In State care, the belief was that he would be safe; fed, clothed by his family and given hope. Hope to eventually get better and live a productive life.

On March 17, 2010, our hope for recovery was shattered. While on a fresh-air break, and supposedly adequately supervised by the CT Valley Hospital Staff, Aaron turned and walked away. No one went after him. No one chased him. And no one found him. I was notified of his disappearance within two hours. Between that day, and the day his remains were found on a beach on Long-Island sound, I asked hundreds of times what was being done to find him and was told that everything possible was being done to find my son. The media tried to help; articles were written and there were some live news coverage. My friends and I sent letters and pleas for help to every shelter in CT; every mental health institution in the State and eventually, every Department of Mental Health in the Country, and yet nothing turned up.

Several months into Aaron's disappearance, I heard about something called "The Silver Alert". I googled it, and found out that every State has one – including the State of CT. The Silver Alert system, effective July 1, 2009, mandates that law enforcement immediately begin searching for missing individuals who are ages 65 or older, or ages 18 and over if mentally impaired. Yet, it was not issued for Aaron. When I asked the Middletown Police almost a year after Aaron's disappearance, I was told that they did not know of the Silver Alert.

I'm here today to advocate for the Silver Alert. With the Silver Alert, Aaron may have been found. We'll never know. We do know that without it, others will be lost forever.

Thank you for your attention today and I welcome any questions you may have.