

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2003 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 784

(Delegate Cardin, *et al.*)

Judiciary

Public Safety - Maryland AMBER Plan - Reporting Requirement

This bill requires the Maryland State Police to report to the General Assembly by December 31 of each year on the activity and status of the Maryland America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response (AMBER) Plan.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: None. The bill's requirements could be handled with the existing budgeted resources of the Department of State Police.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: The AMBER plan is a voluntary partnership between law enforcement agencies and broadcasters to activate an urgent bulletin in the most serious child abduction cases. Broadcasters use the Emergency Alert System, formerly called the Emergency Broadcast System, to air a description of the abducted child and suspected abductor. This is the same concept used during severe weather emergencies. AMBER alert information is coordinated by the Maryland State Police.

Background: Since the original AMBER Plan was established in 1996, 86 modified versions have been adopted at local, regional, and statewide levels, as well as in Canada.

In August 2002, Maryland became an AMBER Alert state. There are now 37 states that use such systems to help find abducted children.

The alerts, named after nine-year old Amber Hagerman, who was kidnapped while riding her bicycle in Arlington, Texas, and killed, rely on the use of highway message boards, as well as television and radio stations to broadcast the messages. They are issued only when, after a confirmed abduction, police believe that a child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death and have descriptive information about the child and suspect. The AMBER Alert system is credited with the rescue of at least 45 children since the program was begun in 1996.

When highway message signs were used in Maryland on February 11, 2003, after it was believed that a child had been abducted in West Baltimore during a robbery, more than 60 State highway signs flashed the message: "AMBER ALERT. CALL 911. WHITE HONDA ACCORD. PARTIAL MD TAG JFK." According to the State Police, many motorists mistook the message as a terrorist alert. As a result, the State Police announced that all future alerts will now flash "Child AMBER Alert" when police are looking for a missing child.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of State Police, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - March 5, 2003
ncs/cer

Analysis by: Guy G. Cherry

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510