

Department of Legislative Services  
Maryland General Assembly  
2010 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 1473

(Delegate Anderson)

Judiciary

Judicial Proceedings

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Public Safety - Missing Offenders - Blue Alert Program

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This bill requires the Department of State Police (DSP) to establish a Blue Alert Program to provide a system for rapid dissemination of information to assist in locating and apprehending a “missing offender.” DSP is required to adopt guidelines and develop procedures for issuing a Blue Alert. DSP must also provide training and assistance to local law enforcement agencies; recruit broadcasters, local volunteer groups, and other members of the public for assistance in a Blue Alert; and consult with the State Highway Administration (SHA) and the Governor’s Division of Emergency Management to establish a plan for providing relevant information to the public through a dynamic message sign system located across the State. A local law enforcement officer or agency who apprehends a missing offender must immediately notify DSP and the agency that filed the missing offender report of that fact.

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Fiscal Summary

**State Effect:** None. The bill’s requirements can be handled with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

**Local Effect:** None. The bill’s requirements for local law enforcement units can be handled with existing budgeted resources.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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Analysis

**Current Law/Background:** The AMBER Alert Plan in Maryland 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.

The alerts rely on the use of highway message boards as well as television and radio stations to broadcast the messages. They are issued when police believe that a child is in danger of serious bodily harm or death and have descriptive information about the child and suspect.

According to Maryland's AMBER Alert Plan, when the abduction of a child age 14 or under (or 15-17 with extenuating circumstances) occurs, law enforcement officers responding to the call will contact a State Police duty officer trained to handle such cases. After verifying the abduction meets the AMBER Alert criteria, the State Police activate the Emergency Alert System, notifying radio, television, and cable outlets; the Maryland Department of Transportation; and surrounding states.

Chapter 528 of 2004 established a Task Force on Missing Vulnerable Adults, in part, to investigate integration with the Maryland AMBER Alert Plan and the broadcast media in locating missing vulnerable adults. In its final report, issued October 1, 2005, the task force did not recommend integration with the Maryland AMBER Alert Plan due to Federal Communications Commission requirements and protocol.

Chapters 503 and 504 of 2009 created a statewide Silver Alert Program within DSP to provide a system for rapid dissemination of information to assist in locating a "missing person." DSP was required to take several specific procedural, training, local assistance, and recruitment actions, as well as to consult with SHA and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), to implement the program objectives.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Baltimore, Carroll, Harford, and Montgomery counties; Governor's Office; Department of State Police; Maryland Department of Transportation; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - March 19, 2010  
mpc/hlb

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