



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 27, 2024

Senate Bill 817
Public Safety – Missing Persons With Cognitive Impairment – Purple Alert
Program
Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 817 aims to establish a Purple Alert Program designed to disseminate crucial information for locating individuals with cognitive impairments who go missing and pose a credible threat to their health and safety. This program targets individuals who do not meet the activation criteria under the Silver Alert program, specifically those with cognitive impairment, intellectual or developmental disabilities, or brain injuries. The bill proposes several key measures including: (I) providing training to local law enforcement agencies, guiding them on the appropriate guidelines and procedures when handling reports of missing persons with cognitive impairments; (II) assisting in the development and implementation of radio and television broadcasting, as well as public engagement, to facilitate the Purple Alert system.

Implementing Senate Bill 817 is seen as a crucial step in safeguarding a vulnerable population within the state. The alert system is essential for disseminating vital information promptly, enabling the community to assist in locating cognitively impaired individuals facing potential danger. The success of alert systems in locating missing persons is evident, with Florida's Purple Alert system achieving a remarkable 94% success rate in 2022.¹ By fostering community involvement, this bill not only strengthens Maryland's unity but also empowers citizens to play an active role in protecting underserved individuals. Prioritizing the safety of marginalized individuals remains a legislative imperative in building an equitable society. The proposed Purple Alert system contributes to this goal by reducing prejudice and reinforcing the value of those with cognitive impairments as integral members of our communities.

¹ <https://www.abc27.com/local-news/lancaster/new-legislation-for-text-alerts-for-missing-children-and-adults-with-cognitive-disabilities/>

The MCC, dedicated to promoting equitable inclusion, advocates for the passage of Senate Bill 817. Recognizing the intrinsic human value of every individual, the Purple Alert system becomes a crucial tool in ensuring the protection and well-being of those with cognitive impairments.

For these reasons, the MCC asks for a favorable report on **SB 817**.

Thank you for your consideration.