

My name is Wendy Mays. I am a former broadcaster and now serve as the Executive Director of the Vermont Association of Broadcasters (VAB).

Since Human Services is a committee that doesn't usually hear from the broadcasters, I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to tell you a little bit about who we are and thank you for hearing the broadcasters perspective on the creation of a Silver Alert Program as the entities that relay emergency alerts.

There are nine network and public television stations and almost 100 commercial, community, college and public radio stations operating throughout Vermont. Every station is licensed to a Vermont community by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and are all dedicated to the communities we serve. We take our responsibility to keep Vermonters well informed and safe very seriously. No other time has this been more apparent than over the last two years when local TV and radio stations used their airwaves to continuously disseminate critical, truthful and fact-based information about how to stop the spread of COVID, where to find masks, tests and vaccinations. We also pre-empted regularly scheduled programs to run extended local news coverage, interview public officials and carry the Governor's long press conferences in full multiple times a week.

Vermont broadcast radio and television stations support the creation of a Silver Alert program. But we ask this committee to please consider narrowing the current draft language definition of "anyone age 60 or older *or* with a Psychiatric, Developmental or Cognitive disability or impairment".

As Tucker Jones stated on Wednesday, there have only been 3-4 AMBER alerts issued since 2006. The Vermont State Police are estimating based on their missing persons case data that there could be 20 Silver Alerts being triggered each month. If the EAS tones get used on an almost daily basis, it will create listener/viewer fatigue and they will no longer pay attention and will tune the EAS tones out. Understand that the EAS system tones are already heard frequently because of severe weather as well as required weekly and monthly tests. So adding use of the tones on an almost daily basis is why we are concerned.

The reason AMBER alert is a crucial tool is because when a child is abducted, time is of the essence. The abductor will likely attempt to drive as far away as they can as quickly as possible. So alerting the entire state to be on the lookout is essential.

With Silver alert, the use of a car is *less* likely. It is *more* likely that a person who is suffering confusion will be on foot and therefore unable to travel as far as quickly. So keeping the alert localized to the area they live in or were last seen in makes more sense.

Unfortunately, the Emergency Alert System isn't designed like an a la carte menu where you can pick and choose and only have it go out to one local town or county. When an AMBER or BLUE alert is triggered, the signal originates at the Vermont State Police barracks, which gets picked up by the EAS decoding machines at the State Primary stations. The EAS machines at the stations monitoring the state primary stations decode the alert and then relay it to the rest of the stations around Vermont. This "daisy chain" happens within a few minutes.

The Vermont State Police already have an existing way to disseminate missing persons reports to the media and it is working. In the case of Clint Cassavant, the Essex Police did a fantastic job of alerting their entire communications network to his disappearance and although incredibly sad, it is my professional opinion that issuing a Silver Alert would not have changed the outcome in that case.

I want to reiterate that Vermont radio and television broadcasters support the creation of a Silver Alert Program. But the unintended consequence of listener/viewer fatigue that leads to ignoring EAS tones if used too frequently, is why we are asking your committee to narrow the definition of what situation would trigger a Silver Alert so it is not used as many times as the Vermont State Police have estimated.

Thank you for your consideration and if the broadcasters can be of any additional help as you navigate your way through H.530, please consider us a supportive resource.