

Understanding state's missing person alert systems

BY JAMES ALLEN TIPTON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

On July 15, 2024, Kentucky's Ian Alert System went into effect. One year later, the system was utilized for the first time to report a missing child in Hart County. The child was reported to be found not long after the initial alert was sent across the state, but had died of drowning. My prayers are with the family and friends of the child in their time of grief. Following last week's tragedy, there has been confusion across our state regarding the different alert systems for missing or endangered persons. I want to take the time to explain the different alert systems we have in Kentucky to increase public understanding of these protective measures.

Amber Alert: This system, which is now nation-

wide, began in 1996 in Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas as a collaborative effort between law enforcement and journalists wanting to get the word out quickly about missing children. AMBER is an acronym for America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response, and memorializes Amber Hagerman, a 9-year-old girl who was abducted and murdered in Arlington, Texas. For Amber Alerts to be issued, the missing person must be 17-years-old or younger, at risk of serious injury or death, and there must be a confirmed abduction with sufficient descriptive information in regards to the child, captor, or captor's vehicle.

Ian Alert: In the 2024 General Assembly, Representative Candy Massaroni introduced HB 682, a bill to create a special alert system for when a child with autism spectrum disorder is reported miss-

ing. This system's name remembers Ian Sousis of Northern Kentucky, a 9-year-old boy with autism spectrum disorder who ran away and tragically died of drowning. Approximately 49% of autistic children wander away from home and safe environments and are 160 times more likely to die by drowning. With a specific alert system, the situation is differentiated for the public from an abducted child case.

Ashanti Alert: This system was also implemented into Kentucky law during the 2024 General Assembly with SB 45. In 2018, the Ashanti Alert Act was passed nationally in honor of Ashanti Billie, a 19-year-old woman from Virginia who was abducted and

found dead in North Carolina 2 weeks later. This system is used for missing persons 18 years or older who may have been abducted, kidnapped, or in physical danger. This system provides an alert for people who have aged out of Amber Alerts and do not meet the qualifications for Golden Alerts.

Golden Alert: This Kentucky alert system was created during the 2008 General Assembly. Golden Alerts are used to notify the public of the search and rescue efforts for missing adults with disabilities or impairments. These may include developmental disabilities, organic brain disorders, as well as physical, mental, or cogni-

tive impairments. These alerts offer something more specific than an Ashanti Alert for adults that may be at a higher risk of danger.

Green Alert: The 2019 General Assembly voted to implement a Green Alert system for Kentucky. This alert system is for missing veterans who are at risk of harm due to physical or mental injuries sustained during service. Separating from the Golden Alert and specializing an alert system for veterans allows search and rescue parties to understand the unique difficulties these individuals may be facing.

Each of these systems alerts the public of any missing individual that

they may be able to assist in finding. These alerts are important to ensure the safety of our fellow Kentuckians because when we are made aware of those who are missing, we are able to help find them.

As always, I can be reached on my mobile at (502)639-7079 or through the toll-free message line in Frankfort at 1-800-372-7181. You can also contact me via email at James.Tipton@kylegislature.gov and keep track through the Kentucky legislature's website at legislature.ky.gov.

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