

'Silver Alert' picks up steam on the Federal and State levels

Late last night, the U.S. House of Representatives approved legislation (H.R. 6064) that includes key portions of a bill sponsored by U.S. Rep. Gus M. Bilirakis (R-Fla.) to create a federal grant program to help states establish silver alert notification systems to help find missing seniors. Gus plans to press for passage by the Senate and enactment into law before Congress adjourns for the year.

Earlier this week 'Silver Alert' systems garnered support on the state level in both South Carolina and New Jersey.

South Carolina's Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer declared his support for instituting a 'Silver Alert' notification system:

South Carolina should join 10 other states in creating an alert system to quickly find older adults who wander off because they suffer from Alzheimer's disease or dementia, Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer said Tuesday.

"We realize there's a problem," Bauer said in his opening remarks to the 10th annual Silver Haired Legislature, a volunteer group of about 100 delegates who represent South Carolina voters over age 60. An emergency Silver Alert system could help find people quickly, Bauer said.

An estimated 53,000 South Carolina residents suffer from Alzheimer's disease or related dementia, and the numbers are expected to grow to 90,000 by 2030. Wandering is common for dementia patients, and while 95 percent are found within 1.5 miles of their home, half of those not found in 24 hours risk serious injuries or death, according to the Illinois-based Alzheimer's Association.

Meanwhile, lawmakers in New Jersey advanced a bill to establish 'Silver Alert' to find lost seniors:

New Jersey would become the 11th state to create an emergency system for locating elderly residents gone missing, under a bill that advanced Monday. "This offers a quick way to alert the public and law enforcement about missing senior citizens, and time is often of the essence in these situations, so we should do anything we can to help hastily distribute information," said co-sponsor Sandra Love, D-Gloucester. Hundreds of seniors and others with dementia wander away every year, on foot or driving.

The Alzheimer's Association says at least half are injured or die if they are not found within 24 hours. "That's reason

enough to get this into law," said Assemblyman Paul Moriarty, D-Camden, a co-sponsor. Under provisions of the bill, news of a missing elderly resident would be broadcast on the radio and on television. Electronic highway message boards could also be put to use, in much the way descriptions of missing children are posted.

State programs, which can be inexpensive to operate if they piggyback on existing Amber Alert communication systems, vary from state to state. All states use similar public announcements but differ on who is covered and what is required to file an alert.

The New Jersey legislation proposes broadcasting an alert as often as possible for the first three hours, then rebroadcasting it at intervals deemed appropriate by the investigating authorities and participating media.

The Assembly Law and Public Safety Committee advanced the bill by a 4-0 vote with two abstentions. It now heads to the Assembly speaker, who can post it for a floor vote.

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