The Honorable Gus M. Bilirakis

Testimony before the House Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security
Hearing on H.R. 6064, the National Silver Alert Act; H.R. 5898, the Silver Alert
Grant Program Act; and H.R. 423, the Kristen's Act Reauthorization of 2007

July 15, 2008

Thank you, Chairman Scott. I want to thank you and Ranking Member Gohmert for holding this hearing on an issue of great importance to me and many of our constituents.

I am honored to testify before this distinguished panel about my bill, the Silver Alert Grant Program Act, and efforts to establish state notification systems to help find missing individuals suffering from dementia-related illnesses.

I first became involved in this issue earlier this year when one of my constituents, Mary Lallucci, lost her mother, who had wandered away from her care-giving facility and could not be located before she had driven her car into the Gulf of Mexico and drown.

This tragedy unfortunately highlights the very real problem of older individuals who suffer from diseases which leave them easily confused and disoriented, wandering away from their homes or care-giving facilities and meeting harm because family, friends, and authorities could not find them in time.

The inability to find missing elderly is a problem state and federal policy-makers should address before something like this happens again. That is why I have introduced H.R. 5898, the Silver Alert Grant Program Act, which has been endorsed by the Alzheimer's Association.

My bill would establish a grant program within the Department of Justice, allowing states to obtain needed funding to establish or make improvements to their Silver Alert notification systems, which help locate individuals with Alzheimer's disease and other dementia-related illnesses before they harm themselves or others.

The bill also would require the Attorney General to report to Congress on the experiences of states that have implemented such notification systems to help guide their establishment in other states.

I have secured strong bipartisan support for my bill since introducing it in April, including cosponsorship by 86 of our colleagues, of which there are 49 Republican cosponsors and 37 Democratic ones. I am proud that the entire Florida congressional delegation also has cosponsored my measure, as have six members of the Judiciary Committee.

I believe that Florida and other states should establish alert systems similar to the highly-successful Amber Alert program to help find those suffering from dementia-related illnesses and prevent tragedies like the one that occurred in my community.

The experiences of states that already have developed such silver alert systems suggest that these programs save lives. States have found that, just as with missing and abducted children, the ability to filter pertinent information so that relevant details are transmitted to appropriate authorities as quickly as possible greatly improves the chances of finding missing seniors safely.

I believe that the federal government can and should help states develop systems to prevent these all too frequent tragedies. This is especially important in Florida, which has more residents age 65 and older than any state in the nation. My state needs silver alert. And it needs it now.

Mrs. Lallucci was asked whether she thought a Silver Alert system in Florida could have saved her mother. "Who knows," she said. "Unfortunately, I will never know."

Mr. Chairman, I believe Congress should pass legislation to create a federal silver alert grant program so that states can enact these systems to prevent another family from being forced to struggle with that same uncertainty.

Before I finish, I want to thank Congressman Doggett for his work on this issue. Although his bill is broader in scope than mine, I fully support combining these complementary bills and moving them through the Judiciary Committee, together with Congresswoman Myrick's bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this very important issue, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions that you or members of this subcommittee may have.

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