

Assemblyman Democrats Press Release

**Sixth Legislative District:
FOR RELEASE:
December 22, 2002**

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**GREENWALD/GUEAR MEASURE ENACTING
AMBER ALERT PLAN SIGNED INTO LAW**

System Employs Local Broadcast Media in Helping Locate Missing Children

(TRENTON) -- A bill sponsored by Assemblymen Louis D. Greenwald and Gary Guear codifying the America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response -- AMBER Plan child-protection program -- was signed into law today by Governor James E. McGreevey.

"New Jersey law enforcement now has one of the most effective tools to thwart kidnapers and save children's lives," said Greenwald (D-Voorhees). "The AMBER alert system has been used successfully time and again throughout the country, helping to reunite youngsters and their families."

New Jersey's AMBER Alert plan was instituted in August after a series of high-profile abductions. In one case, two teenaged-girls who had been kidnapped were saved after California employed its AMBER system for the first time.

The new law (A-1558) will enable State Police to work in conjunction with participating television and radio stations when a child is abducted. The media may then interrupt programming and broadcast identifying information about the child and suspect as often as possible for the first three hours, then at such intervals as the State Police and participating media deem appropriate thereafter. Message signs on the state's highways also will be used to alert the public to a kidnapping.

"There is no time to waste when a child is abducted," said Guear (D-Hamilton), a former Trenton police detective. "Fast action by law enforcement through the use of AMBER alerts will help stop kidnapers before the unthinkable happens."

The law requires these criteria to be met to activate the plan:

The child is believed to be abducted;

The child is 17 years of age or younger;

The child may be in danger of death or serious bodily injury; and

There is sufficient information available to indicate that an AMBER Alert would assist in locating the child.

The AMBER Plan and related alerts have led to the rescue of 41 children nationwide since 1996. The AMBER Alert System, already active in 30 states, buys time when investigators need it most -- in the first few hours after a child disappears.

"It hasn't taken long for most states in the nation to get on board with this concept," said Greenwald. "Through AMBER alerts, every citizen can get involved in the rescue of an abducted child."

The AMBER plan is named in honor of Amber Hagerman, a 9 year old Arlington, Texas girl, who was kidnapped and murdered in 1996. Although the abduction was witnessed, a description of the suspect and his vehicle was not quickly disseminated to the public and the result was fatal.