

# ASSEMBLY DEMOCRATS NEWS RELEASE



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**GREENWALD, GUEAR PLEASED SENATE TO TAKE ACTION ON AMBER PLAN BILL**

Republican Senate President Promises to Move Measure Through Upper House

(TRENTON) -- After mounting a ten-month crusade to set up an Amber Plan child-abduction alert system in New Jersey, Assemblymen Louis D. Greenwald and Gary Guear expressed satisfaction Senate leaders have made a commitment to act on legislation to enact the plan when the Legislature reconvenes in September.

Republican Senate President John O. Bennett (R-Monmouth) and Senate Law and Public Safety and Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Peter Inverso (R-Mercer) today said the committee would consider the bill (A-1558) when it meets on September 9.

"It seems every day there is news of another child abduction from around the country," said Greenwald (D-Camden). "I am gratified that Senate Leadership recognize the crisis that makes Amber Alerts vital to protecting youngsters in New Jersey."

The measure sponsored by Greenwald and Guear (D-Middlesex) was passed unanimously by the Assembly in June.

After a series of high profile abductions, Governor James E. McGreevey, along with Greenwald and Guear, stepped up implementation of a state police-designed "Amber Alert Plan". McGreevey set a deadline of September 30 to have the system fully operational.

"In a world where teenagers and young children are snatched off the street by unscrupulous criminals, we need a network to quickly apprehend the bad guys before the unthinkable happens," said Guear. "The Amber Plan and related alerts have led to the rescue of 21 children since 1996."

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Recently, California's brand new Amber Alert Plan was put into use when an ex-convict who was on the run from a rape charge abducted two teenage girls at gunpoint from a local lover's lane. Police caught up to the suspect 12 hours later, with tips from someone who had seen the alert flashing on electronic freeway signs. The girls had been raped but were still alive. It was the first time the Amber Alert had been used in that state.

Greenwald and Guear's legislation would enable state police to work in conjunction with participating television and radio stations when a child is abducted. The media would then interrupt

programming and broadcast identifying information about the child and suspect every 15 minutes for the next several hours.

"We cannot afford to wait to enact the alert system -- every moment counts when a child is abducted," said Greenwald. "I'm pleased the Senate is joining with us to make the state safer for our children."

The Amber Alert System, already active in 14 states, buys time where investigators need it most -- in the first hours after a child disappears.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice and a study by the State of Washington, there is typically more than a two-hour delay in making the initial missing child report. In addition, they found that 74 percent of the children murdered by non-family members are killed within the first three hours of their abduction.

"We can see that the Amber system works," said Guear. "The recent string of child abductions has shocked the nation. Only by enacting the Amber Plan can we ensure we are doing all we can to return those children safely into the arms of their parents."

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.

There are roughly a million kids reported missing each year in this country. The majority are runaways who return home in a few hours or days; thousands are family abductions, often stemming from custody battles between parents; and, the U.S. Justice Department estimates about 100,000 stranger abductions are attempted annually.