

Testimony of
Mr. Edward Fritts

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Madame Chair and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify today in support of this legislation on behalf of the National Association of Broadcasters. Let me especially thank the Chair and Senator Hutchison for their leadership on this issue. As we have seen in recent weeks, the issue has never been more relevant.

We're pleased that colleagues in our industry developed this plan as a response to tragic abduction and murder. Since then, broadcasters have continued to play a central role in the AMBER Plan. We are pleased today to continue that role by announcing our support for the "National AMBER Alert Network Act of 2002". We believe the legislation could significantly accelerate adoption of AMBER Plans throughout the country.

The voluntary AMBER Plan harnesses cooperation between local stations and law enforcement to aid in the recovery of abducted children. To date, the program has successfully brought 30 children home.

Although every Plan is unique to its community, there are 3 basic criteria that are met before an Alert is activated. First, law enforcement confirms a child has been abducted. Second, law enforcement affirms that the circumstances surrounding the abduction indicate that the child is in danger of serious bodily harm. Lastly, there must be enough descriptive information about the child, abductor, or a suspect's vehicle to make an immediate broadcast alert productive.

Broadcasters are uniquely positioned to disseminate information rapidly to an entire community. No other industry is capable of broadcasters' reach in conveying this information. Consider this: while driving in their vehicles, as many as 95 percent of adult motorists listen to their local radio stations. This, coupled with television means that local broadcasters have the ability to get information to the public with unparalleled immediacy.

Our partners at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children have the statistical evidence to back this up: in cases of abduction, time is absolutely critical. As such, it only makes sense that we use our ability to assist law enforcement in the safe recovery of abducted children.

Recognizing the value of the AMBER Plan, in 2001 NAB partnered with the Center and with the Department of Justice to develop an "AMBER kit" which was distributed to law enforcement units and broadcast stations nationwide in order to expand the Plan's reach. When we began this effort last fall, there were twenty-seven AMBER Plans in place. Today, fifty-five communities, states, and regions have Plans and we expect more systems to be rolled out by year's end.

I believe the AMBER Plan is especially significant because its growth and success have exemplified the twin traditions that have historically guided our industry: namely localism and

our commitment to voluntary public service.

In terms of localism, the system has been effective precisely because of its flexibility. Depending upon the information law enforcement provides, stations can send out Alerts in a single community, statewide, or even regionally when interstate travel is involved.

Again Madame Chair, our industry is proud today to endorse this legislation. However, anyone who has been in Washington for any length of time knows that good bills can be poorly implemented. I would like to touch upon three principles that have guided the AMBER Plan in the past and must continue to do so.

First, broadcasters are central to the plan because of our ability to disseminate information on a moment's notice.

Second, the AMBER Plan remains voluntary and flexible, thereby allowing local law enforcement to work closely with local stations to most effectively serve communities.

Third, it is critical that the Plan continue to be used only in cases of abduction where there is imminent threat of harm.

Let me reemphasize: we stand ready to work with you closely as this legislation moves through Committee and the entire Congress.

Someone once said, "Children are the flowers of life." As a father and grandfather myself, I could not agree more. Protecting the most vulnerable of our society - children--must be a top priority for all of us.

Thank you again for having me and I look forward to answering your questions.