

Testimony of

The Honorable Orrin Hatch

September 4, 2002

Madame Chairwoman, I want to thank you for holding this important hearing on a topic of great concern to us all. And I want to commend you and Senator Hutchison for your tireless efforts on behalf of children and families. The recent wave of child abductions that has swept our nation, and included the kidnapping of Elizabeth Smart in my own home state of Utah, has illustrated the tremendous need for legislation in this area.

Without question, when it comes to child abductions, time is of the essence. We are all too aware that child abductors prey on the youngest, most innocent and vulnerable members of our society - often for the purpose of committing other serious violent crimes against them. Too often it is only a matter of hours before a kidnapper abuses, assaults or kills the child victim. According to statistics released by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, almost 75% of the murders that occur following child abductions happen within the first 3 hours.

AMBER Alert systems are critical to successful search and recovery efforts because they enable law enforcement authorities to galvanize entire communities to assist in the safe recovery of child victims. We recently witnessed the success of the AMBER Alert system in California where the system was used to broadcast the disappearance of Nichole Timmons. After she was recognized, Nichole was safely recovered in the neighboring state of Nevada. I want to thank Nichole and her mother, Sharon Timmons, for appearing here today. You give hope to us all.

I also want to thank Marc Klaas for coming here and for his efforts to encourage the development of AMBER systems nationwide.

In another recent California case, the AMBER Alert system was used to broadcast the disappearances of Tamera Brooks and Jaqueline Marris. Just hours after their abduction, and minutes before their possible murder, the two young women were found.

I understand that to date, only 18 states have adopted statewide AMBER Alert systems. Just this year, my home state of Utah adopted a statewide alert program aimed at preventing child abduction called the "Rachel Alert." The program was named after young Rachel Runyan who was kidnapped from behind her home in Sunset, Utah and later found murdered.

I am pleased to see that law enforcement agencies are working closely with broadcasters and the public to develop AMBER Alert systems across our country. And I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on these advancements. Despite these efforts, however, I believe a National AMBER Alert Coordinator in the Department of Justice is needed to assist States in developing effective alert plans that can be coordinated nationwide.

Fortunately, we already have the technology in place to do just that - the Emergency Broadcast System. For years, broadcasters have been cooperating with government officials and reaching Americans across our country by issuing emergency alerts on our televisions and radios. We

have all experienced an interruption in regular programing so that a news breaking announcement can be made. With the addition of a National AMBER Alert Coordinator and continued cooperation between law enforcement officials and broadcasters, we can create an effective national AMBER Alert system.

I am proud to support the "National AMBER Alert Network Act." We have no greater resource than our children, and we need to see to it that we do all we can to protect them from predators of all types.

Again, I want to thank Senator Feinstein for holding this hearing, and I want to thank all of our fine witnesses for being here today. I look forward to hearing your testimony on this critical topic.

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