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Governor Crist Signs Executive Order Creating 'Silver Alert'

Governor Charlie Crist today signed Executive Order 08-211 enacting Florida's 'Silver Alert,' which allows the immediate broadcast of information to the public regarding missing elders with dementia or other cognitive impairment. The Executive Order provides a coordinated response between local and state law enforcement to quickly broadcast important information to citizens so they can assist local law enforcement in the rescue of the endangered person and notify law enforcement with helpful information.

"Florida's seniors have built Florida's rich heritage and continue to help strengthen our families and communities, and we have a duty to honor them with our utmost respect and dignity," Governor Crist said. "The Silver Alert program we launch today will allow the people of Florida, as well as visitors to the Sunshine State, to help ensure the safety and security of vulnerable seniors."

More than 4.3 million Florida residents are age 60 and older, and there are about 501,000 probable Alzheimer's cases. While 95 percent of the state's seniors live independently, the Silver Alert program will help prevent tragedy among one of Florida's largest potentially vulnerable groups. According to the Alzheimer's Association, 95 percent of people with Alzheimer's disease who wander are found within a quarter-mile of their place of residence or the last location seen.

Silver Alerts will help local law enforcement find elders with dementia or other cognitive impairment and return them home safely. For families and caregivers of loved ones assisted by the Silver Alert, it will also increase awareness of the possibility of future problems or the need for additional assistance.

"Fortunately, the vast majority of Florida seniors will never need a Silver Alert. For those few who do, the program can save their lives," said Department of Elder Affairs Secretary E. Douglas Beach.

Governor Crist was joined by Mary Lallucci, an advocate for the Silver Alert program. Earlier this year, Lallucci's 86-year-old mother Mary Zelter disappeared after signing out of her assisted living facility in Largo to drive to the supermarket. A week later, Zelter and the vehicle she was driving were found in the inter-coastal waterway, about nine miles from her assisted living facility. Zelter suffered from dementia.

The statewide Silver Alert program will enhance local law enforcement's response by providing a means to broadcast vehicle description information to motorists. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), in partnership with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicle's Florida Highway Patrol (FHP), will activate the dynamic message signs in situations where the elderly person is driving a vehicle.

"In a missing person situation, getting the word out – and getting it out quickly – is key to a swift and safe recovery," said FDLE Commissioner Gerald Bailey. "Florida's plan ensures a prompt and comprehensive response while ensuring the privacy and dignity of our elders."

Under the Silver Alert program, local law enforcement agencies are encouraged to develop policies and procedures that will work best in their respective jurisdictions to broadcast information to the public in a quick and effective manner. In addition, local agencies may contact FDLE to request the use of the FDOT dynamic message signs if the missing elderly person is in a vehicle and meets the following criteria:

- The missing person must be age 60 or older and present a clear indication that the individual has an irreversible deterioration of intellectual faculties, or under extraordinary circumstances when a person age 18 to 59 has irreversible deterioration of intellectual faculties and law enforcement has determined the individual lacks the capacity to consent, and that the use of dynamic message signs may be the only possible way to rescue the missing person.
- Local law enforcement has already activated a local or regional alert by contacting media outlets.
- The law enforcement agency's investigation has concluded that the disappearance poses a credible threat to the person's safety.
- A description of the vehicle and a tag number is available and has been verified by local law enforcement.
- The local law enforcement agency has entered the missing person into the Florida Crime Information Center and issued a statewide "Be On the Look Out" (BOLO) to other law enforcement/911 centers.

To learn more about the Florida Silver Alert program, visit www.fdle.state.fl.us.

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