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Klein Testifies on Critical Child Protection Bill

Legislation aims to expand South Florida program nationwide

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Representative Ron Klein (FL-22) today testified before a subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee in support of critical legislation he authored to protect our nation's children. The legislation, the A Child Is Missing Alert and Recovery Center Act (H.R. 5464) would expand the widely-praised South Florida non-profit A Child Is Missing into a national program with regional centers under the Department of Justice.

"A Child Is Missing is the only program of its kind," Klein said in his testimony before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security. "This program fills a critical gap in time in the most dangerous cases, and can be the difference between whether a child lives or dies."

When a person is reported missing, A Child Is Missing utilizes the latest technology to place 1,000 emergency telephone calls every 60 seconds to residents and businesses in the area where the person was last seen. The program works in concert with the AMBER Alert, but is activated more quickly, as AMBER Alerts are issued three to five hours after a criminal abduction. Time is a critical factor, as 74 percent of children who are kidnapped and murdered are slain within three hours of their abduction. Klein's legislation has the support of law enforcement agencies all across the country.

"I am proud that this program has its roots in South Florida," Klein said following the hearing, at which Ft. Lauderdale resident and A Child is Missing founder Sherry Friedlander also testified. "This is an extremely successful program that could benefit countless children and their families around the country, and I am eager to expand it nationwide. Every parent's worst nightmare is to see their child go missing, but this program can put their minds at ease by utilizing the latest technology to quickly find missing children and avoid potential tragedy."

H.R. 5464 has broad bipartisan support in Congress, including co-sponsors from all across the county. Companion legislation has also been introduced in the U.S. Senate, where the author is Senator Robert Menendez of New Jersey and a key co-sponsor is Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah, a former chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The text of Klein's testimony follows.

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

**Testimony of Congressman Ron Klein (FL-22)
Before the House Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
H.R. 5464, the “A Child Is Missing Alert and Recovery Center Act”**

Thank you, Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Gohmert, for holding this important hearing today and for allowing me to testify in support my legislation, H.R. 5464, the “A Child Is Missing Alert and Recovery Center Act.”

H.R. 5464 would expand the widely-praised A Child Is Missing non-profit organization into a national program with regional centers under the Department of Justice. It would accomplish this expansion through annual grants from the Attorney General in the amount of \$5 million from 2009 through 2014.

The funds would also allow for the purchase of future technologies and techniques, centralized and on-site training, and for the distribution of information to Federal, State, and local law enforcement agency officials on the best ways to utilize the round-the-clock services provided by the A Child Is Missing Alert and Recovery Center.

Currently, A Child Is Missing is the only program of its kind that assists in all missing cases involving abduction, children who are lost, wander or run away, or adults with special needs such as the elderly who suffer with Alzheimer's, which is a major problem in my district in South Florida.

When a person is reported missing to the police, A Child Is Missing utilizes the latest technology to place 1,000 emergency telephone calls every 60 seconds to residents and businesses in the area where the person was last seen. It works in concert with the AMBER Alert and all child safety programs, and has the support of law enforcement agencies all across the country.

A Child Is Missing also fills a critical gap in time in the most dangerous cases. Although the AMBER Alert has been an extremely successful program, there is still a crucial void from when a child is first reported missing and when an AMBER Alert, which is activated only in cases of criminal abduction, can be issued, which is approximately three to five hours.

This critical period of time can be the difference between whether a child lives or dies. A Washington State Attorney General's office study showed that among cases involving children abducted and murdered, 74 percent were slain in the first 3 hours.

Adding to the problem is the resource and manpower limitations facing many local law enforcement agencies. Roughly half of these offices in the United States have 25 or fewer officers, and an average twelve-hour search for a missing child can cost as much as \$400,000.

A Child Is Missing helps to fill this critical gap in time as well as complement the AMBER Alert during its ongoing search. We know this for a fact because we've heard it from countless law enforcement officers all across America, and you will hear again during the next panel.

So the issue isn't whether A Child Is Missing works or not. The real issue is that not enough local communities have access to the program. As you will learn from the founder and President of A Child Is Missing, Sherry Friedlander has done a remarkable job spreading the program to all 50 states. But if we're going to bring the program to every community in America, then we'll need to leverage the resources of the federal government, and that's what my legislation attempts to do.

H.R. 5464 has broad bipartisan support in Congress. I count cosponsors from all across the country, including Ohio, Kentucky, Texas, Indiana and New York. On the Senate side, companion legislation was introduced by Senator Menendez and is cosponsored by Senator Hatch, the distinguished former chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

We have such support because A Child Is Missing provides a service that transcends politics. Our children are not Democrats or Republicans. They are all our children and all our responsibility, and their protection requires us to work together, much like this subcommittee is doing today, to do what's best for their continued safety.

I want to thank the Chairman and Ranking Member for inviting me to testify today, and I hope that I will have the support of this subcommittee as we move forward with H.R. 5464.

Thank you.