

## National Silver Alert Grant Program Could Save Lives

Yesterday, Congressman Bilirakis introduced The Silver Alert Grant Program Act of 2008 (H.R. 5898). If enacted, this program would provide U.S. states and territories the opportunity to establish "Silver Alert" notification systems to locate missing individuals suffering from dementia-related illnesses.

In March, the Tampa Tribune wrote about the need for a 'Silver Alert' in Florida...

Florida has more people 65 and older than any other state but hasn't jumped on the bandwagon of the Silver Alert, a system like Amber Alert that spreads word broadly and quickly when someone disappears.

Four states - Texas, Michigan, Illinois and Colorado - have adopted Silver Alert laws to help in situations such as the disappearance Feb. 26 of a Largo woman with dementia who drove off in her car. She was found dead Monday in the Intracoastal Waterway.

Florida has no plans to implement a Silver Alert system, said David Bruns of the Florida chapter of AARP in Tallahassee. Still, Bruns said he hopes the matter is taken up by the state Legislature during its current session.

Florida's 85-plus population is growing twice as fast as that of any other state, Bruns said, and half of people 85 and older have brain health concerns.

H.R. 5898 would provide state legislatures with the necessary seed money to get their own Silver Alert program started. As Congressman Bilirakis told the St. Petersburg Times today, states "should make this a priority, and we don't want them to have any excuses."

Some states already have active Silver Alert notification systems, Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, and Texas. These have been modeled after the highly-successful Amber Alert system.

In fact, today North Carolina issued a Silver Alert for a missing man, Lifest Leon Melvin, who "has dementia or some other cognitive impairment."