

REMARKS
AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

OF

MATT M. DUMMERMUTH
PRINCIPAL DEPUTY ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL
OFFICE OF JUSTICE PROGRAMS

AT THE

NATIONAL AMBER ALERT SYMPOSIUM

ON

TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 2019
SCOTTSDALE, AZ

Thank you, Elizabeth [Strange]. I'm very pleased to be here.

I'd like to thank Elizabeth and her office for serving as our hosts, and for their leadership on behalf of kids here in the District of Arizona. My thanks, as well, to Jim Walters and our partners at Fox Valley Technical College for putting together this symposium, and for the work they do throughout the year to support the AMBER Alert network.

I also want to thank our good friends at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, including our keynote speaker this morning, Alan Nanavaty. NCMEC has played an indispensable role in building and strengthening the AMBER Alert program, particularly through the secondary distribution network, and they continue to help lead our nation's efforts to protect children. The Department of Justice is proud to partner with and support them in the good work they do.

Let me also acknowledge the leadership of Caren Harp and her staff in our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, especially Jim Antal and Lou Ann Holland. Caren, Jim, Lou Ann and the OJJDP team are strong advocates and supporters of the AMBER Alert program, and they're working hard, every day, to make sure you have the technical assistance and the information you need.

And finally, to everyone here – law enforcement officers, AMBER Alert coordinators, state clearinghouse managers and Child Abduction Response Team members – I want to thank you for joining us and for doing the vital work you do to rescue children in danger.

I'm very excited to be here in my dual role as head of the Office of Justice Programs and as the National AMBER Alert Coordinator. I take both of these jobs seriously, and in fact, they are very much intertwined. Protecting children is one of the central tenets of our mission at OJP. In fiscal year 2018, our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention awarded more than \$104 million to protect youth, find missing children, and prosecute child exploitation. More than \$42 million of that amount supports our work to help missing and exploited children, including our partnership with NCMEC and Fox Valley Technical College to support AMBER Alert. Almost \$30 million funds the Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force Program, which is helping law enforcement agencies find and rescue children who are exploited by Internet predators and pornographers. All these grants are helping state, local and tribal agencies – and national groups – do the critical work of keeping kids safe. And, of course, AMBER Alert is a very big part of those efforts.

As a former U.S. Attorney who still sees things through the eyes of a prosecutor, I fully appreciate the value of a public safety tool like AMBER Alert. I oversaw dozens of child exploitation prosecutions during my time in the Northern District of Iowa – including a number of disturbing and tragic cases involving online enticement and child pornography. I saw the depravity that child predators are capable of and the immense and troubling scope of child victimization. Over a 5-year period in my district – two years

before I became U.S. Attorney and during the three years of my service – our office prosecuted cases in half of the 52 counties of our district, with victims ranging in age from 11 months to 17 years.

In one case, we arrested a man from Cedar Rapids for photographing two siblings – a 9-year-old girl and her 13-month-old-sister – while they were being sexually assaulted. We weren't able to recover the images, so during the trial, we had to rely heavily on the testimony of several young witnesses. Sadly, the 9-year-old was not among them. She had been abducted by the pornographer's brother and was later found murdered. Fortunately, the testimony was enough to lead to a conviction, and the man is now serving a 100-year sentence in federal prison. But that little girl's death has remained, for me, a sobering reminder of the need for constant vigilance when it comes to the safety of children.

I hope it can also serve as a reminder to each of you of how much is at stake – and of how important your jobs are. This really is a matter of life and death.

You don't have to look far to find examples of how your work in the AMBER Alert network is making a difference. Last September, a 14-year-old girl from Surprise, Arizona, was enticed into meeting a man who then abducted her from her home. The abductor had a felony warrant for deserting military service and was believed to be suicidal. Thanks to an AMBER Alert and quick action by law enforcement, she was recovered unharmed.

In another case, two brothers – a 5-year-old and a 7-year-old – were abducted from the Navajo reservation by their mother's boyfriend, who had been drinking. AMBER Alerts were issued in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. Police located the man's car, but he had fled, leaving the boys behind, unharmed. They found and arrested him later.

The somewhat dry details of these case descriptions don't quite convey the sense of urgency and danger that, in fact, these abductions represent. As all of you know very well, a child abduction often happens in a moment of high volatility, when the potential for violence is at a peak. Rapid response is critical. Research bears that out. A study of more than 800 child abduction murders found that, in 76 percent of cases, the child was killed within three hours of the abduction. In almost 90 percent of cases, the child was dead within 24 hours. And if anyone thinks that the worst only happens in the rare case of a stranger abduction, think again. As you know, when children are abducted and murdered, their murderer is statistically as likely to be a friend or an acquaintance as a stranger.

There can be no question that a solid and seamless network of AMBER Alert programs is a critical part of our child protection infrastructure. Over the years, AMBER Alert has proved to be a major public safety asset. In 2017 alone, 200 AMBER Alerts were issued in 38 states, involving 263 children. The vast majority of children were recovered within three hours, which is impressive. The secondary distribution network,

which amplifies public alert mechanisms, has been critical to the success of AMBER Alert. In 2017, secondary distribution played a role in 94 percent of AMBER cases, which shows the value of tapping into social and digital media, and other forms of secondary outreach.

These partnerships and alliances continue to grow – and so do our successes. Since the AMBER Alert program was launched more than two decades ago, 957 abducted children have been safely recovered. That’s almost a thousand kids who’ve been taken out of harm’s way and returned to their families.

As we all know, a positive outcome is never guaranteed, but the statistics show that when AMBER Alert is part of the response, the odds are very high that an abducted child will come home safely.

I’m proud of the role my agency, particularly our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, plays in supporting the AMBER Alert network. The AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program is our biggest contribution. It provides a range of onsite and online training courses that have benefitted nearly 55,000 child protection professionals over the last five years. We publish a quarterly newsletter, the *AMBER Advocate*, that reaches over 50,000 people. We host webinars and hold roundtables with parents and siblings of missing and abducted children. We’ve also trained more than 6,000 Child Abduction Response Team members. Twenty-three of those teams have gone through the rigorous CART Certification Program.

The training and technical assistance program is working especially hard to support our tribal partners. The Ashlynn Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act, signed into law by President Trump last year, calls for states to integrate tribal AMBER Alert programs into their own statewide systems, and the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance program is helping tribes develop the capacity of their AMBER programs. So far, we’ve trained more than 1,600 tribal first responders and child protection professionals. And we have an AMBER Alert in Indian Country website that serves as a one-stop shop of training and other resources dedicated to helping tribal officials.

We’ll also be hosting an AMBER Alert in Indian Country Symposium in Albuquerque at the end of July. Tribal and state AMBER Alert officials and others will come together to exchange information and share best practices for implementing AMBER Alert plans in tribal communities. We’re making progress in integrating tribal and state programs. A recent survey of AMBER Alert coordinators in 33 states indicated that all federally recognized tribes in those states are now authorized to participate in their state AMBER Alert plans, compared to just five of the 33 more than a decade ago. The same survey found that 88 percent of tribes currently participate in their states’ plans.

Our partnership with tribes underscores one of the enduring challenges to the AMBER Alert network – that is, that child abductors, and child predators generally, do not observe jurisdictional boundaries. I saw this repeatedly in my work as U.S. Attorney.

Cases of abduction and exploitation that cross borders can present significant legal obstacles to prosecutors, and the tactical challenges they pose to law enforcement officials and AMBER Alert coordinators are no less significant. Those challenges become even more imposing when the boundaries in question are our international borders. Strengthening our transnational ties should remain a priority. As part of our training and assistance work, we're supporting a Southern Border Initiative in cooperation with the Mexican government. We've trained more than 700 state, local and federal child protection officials in the U.S. and Mexico. We've also conducted joint training exercises to address cross-border abductions, trafficking and exploitation. And we've held six regional meetings and a tri-national AMBER Alert conference with our counterparts in both Mexico and Canada.

We also need to pay close attention to the problem of child sex trafficking. This is an issue that demands serious attention from across the criminal justice spectrum, and I'm pleased that it's a focus of this symposium. Data on child trafficking victims – like data on all human trafficking cases – are not easy to come by, but we do have snapshots that give us a sense of the problem. Of the more than 5,100 cases reported to the National Human Trafficking Hotline last year, almost 1,400 involved minors. And of the more than 23,500 endangered runaways reported to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in 2018, one in seven was the victim of sex trafficking.

We're working hard to combat this problem at the Office of Justice Programs. Our Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention funded the National Judicial Institute, which has trained almost 160 judicial officials from 37 states on issues related to domestic child sex trafficking. And they are funding mentoring programs designed to help young victims of sex trafficking, as well as training and assistance to help set up similar programs across the country.

But our top priority should be to ensure that there are no victims in the first place, and AMBER Alert will be central to accomplishing this mission. As the National AMBER Alert Coordinator, I want to know that you have the best tools and the best information available to help you do your jobs. That's why I'm pleased today to announce that, for the first time since 2012, we have updated the AMBER Alert Best Practices guide.

Technology, and our knowledge about what works in responding to child abductions, have evolved over the last seven years, and it's time we give you a resource that helps you adapt to those changes. The new guide is organized around the life cycle of an AMBER Alert, so it connects best practices to each decision point in the response, from intake of a report to specific law enforcement actions and on to the elements that factor into an AMBER Alert coordinator's decisions. It builds on the recovery strategy in the earlier version with a discussion of all the primary and secondary distribution pathways available, including new wireless capabilities and the Common Alerting Protocol. The guide offers tips on maximizing use of social media platforms and on outreach to the media. And it includes guidance on addressing cases that don't meet AMBER Alert criteria.

The guide was developed with the aid of a working group of AMBER Alert coordinators, law enforcement officials, missing children's clearinghouse experts and national advocates, and you can find it online at OJJDP.gov. Our hope is that this document will give you the information and guidance you need to take advantage of all available tools to respond to child abduction cases and recover endangered children in the quickest, safest, most effective way possible.

AMBER Alert is 23 years old, and in those 23 years, it has grown from a single local program into an international force for public safety. What began as an idea shared on a radio show in 1996 has become a household name. Nearly a thousand children have been spared potential harm – perhaps even deadly harm – thanks to the work that you and your predecessors have done. And we can only guess at how many other children have escaped the trauma of abduction simply because predators know AMBER Alert will be there to stop them.

Families across the country owe the safety of their children to all of you. We thank you for your outstanding service – and I pledge that the Office of Justice Programs will continue to give you its full support as you carry on with the vital work of protecting America's children. I'll have the opportunity to meet with you in your regional breakouts, and I'd like to get your feedback. I'd like to know:

- What challenges you're facing, generally.
- What obstacles you see in integrating tribal and state systems.
- Whether we need to do any deconfliction with the Ashanti Alert system.
- And based on your experience, whether it's time to revisit the AMBER Alert criteria with an eye toward reaching more endangered children in way that doesn't overwhelm the system.

I encourage you to think about these questions and give me your thoughts when we meet later. I want to take advantage of this time to hear from you so that I can do my part as AMBER Alert Coordinator to support you.

I look forward to those discussions, and am eager to work with all of you to strengthen the AMBER Alert network and protect America's children.

Thank you.

###