



AARP Alaska
3601 C Street
Suite 1420
Anchorage, AK 99503

T 1-866-227-7447
F 907-341-2270
www.aarp.org/ak

February 11, 2013

The Honorable Max Gruenberg
Alaska Capitol, Room 110
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Re: HB 59 Missing Vulnerable Adult Response Plan - Support

Dear Representative Gruenberg,

On behalf of the 94,000 members of AARP Alaska, I am grateful for your sponsorship of this important legislation to create an emergency response plan to assist in locating a missing vulnerable adult. We offer our support for the passage of this bill.

Just reading through the bill stirs up many memories and emotions of what I often recall as the worst night of my life. As the director of an adult day center in Anchorage, I was responsible for the safety of one of our members who left the building unnoticed in mid-October not many years ago, and went missing. As a center that specialized in caring for persons with dementia, it was not unusual for our members to wander and occasionally try to leave the premises. We had what we believed were good procedures in place to ensure no one left the campus and if they did, how we would find them. It had always been sufficient before...until this particular incident.

When the member was noted missing, and an immediate search of the facility, campus, and neighborhood failed to locate him, we exceeded the limits of any prior planning and began to improvise our response. Throughout the evening we summoned more and more help, including family members, law enforcement, media, and every available staff and volunteer. At midnight the search was called off without success. The weather was chilly and damp. The only available night vision device (at the time) was out in the Mat-Su Valley and couldn't arrive before morning. After the longest night of my life, the next morning at first light the search resumed, and the member was finally found lying in the grass within less than a mile of the center. He was unharmed, though wet and very disoriented.

It is not just professional experience that convinces me of the need for a formulated plan of response. It also happened to my father in Colorado. He walked over a mile and a half away from his assisted living home along and across very busy thoroughfares, and ended up at a Subway Sandwich Shop with no idea where he lived or how he'd gotten there. That incident precipitated his placement into a locked "memory care" unit where he remained for the rest of his life.

The vulnerability of frail elders, especially when there is cognitive impairment, poses too great a risk to not have a plan. The experience of community, public safety and law enforcement, media, and military support all working together with defined and efficient roles when a child is missing, shows us the benefits of a coordinated response. Indeed, in states where "silver alert" procedures are in place, the successful safe return of vulnerable adults to their home has improved significantly.

With the projected demographic tidal wave of numbers of older people, and consequently those with significant physical or cognitive impairment, it is urgent that plans are in place to quickly act

and prevent needless tragedy. "Vulnerable adult" has a legal definition, but it also represents a mother or father, a husband or a wife. No family member should have to endure any more time of uncertainty and anxiety for a loved one's safe return than absolutely necessary. The development of a response plan as your bill suggests will make sure of that.

Thank you for your consideration and sponsorship of this important legislation. Should you have any questions regarding AARP Alaska's support for HB 59, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Helander". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ken" and last name "Helander" clearly distinguishable.

Ken Helander
Advocacy Director
907-762-3314

khelander@aarp.org