

POLICY PROPOSAL

A Vulnerable Persons Alert for Nova Scotia

A proposal to amend the Missing Persons Act, SNS 2012, c 47, to set common criteria, safeguards and public reporting in law for the alerts Nova Scotia police already issue for missing vulnerable persons, for Nova Scotians of any age who cannot keep themselves safe.

Prepared for consideration by the Government of Nova Scotia

Submitted by Parent Partnership Project Inc.

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Executive Summary

Nova Scotia is further along than most provinces. Since 2021, police in Nova Scotia have had direct access to Alert Ready, and the RCMP in Nova Scotia have issued alerts for missing vulnerable persons, some of them directed only to the counties where the person was likely to be. What the province does not have is an express, standing statutory framework establishing common eligibility criteria, safeguards and accountability requirements for Vulnerable Persons Alerts. The Missing Persons Act, in force since April 21, 2015, says nothing about public alerts. Whether a missing person who cannot keep themselves safe reaches the public depends on each police agency's own threshold, and no one reports publicly on how often alerts are considered, issued or declined.

This proposal recommends that Nova Scotia amend the Missing Persons Act to create a single Vulnerable Persons Alert. Eligibility would turn on what a person can and cannot do, not on age or diagnosis. The alert would use the alerting system Nova Scotia police already use, and would not require a new system, a new brand of alert for each condition, or new infrastructure. It would give the province's existing practice common criteria, common safeguards and the Act's first public reporting requirement.

Two drafts are attached for the government's consideration: an amending Bill and companion regulations. Both are discussion drafts for legislative counsel, and both identify the points that need legal verification.

1. Background

1.1 What the Missing Persons Act provides today

The Missing Persons Act, SNS 2012, c 47, was proclaimed in force on April 21, 2015, with the Missing Persons Regulations, N.S. Reg. 202/2015. It lets police apply to a justice for record-access orders and, for a missing minor or vulnerable person, search orders, in missing-person investigations where no crime is suspected. Subsection 8(3) lets a police agency release a missing person's name, physical description and photograph, any medical information that poses a serious or immediate health threat, pertinent vehicle information, and where and in what circumstances the person was last seen, by media release, on a website or in any other manner the agency considers appropriate.

The Act defines a "vulnerable person" by legal status: a person with a representative appointed under the Adult Capacity and Decision-making Act, or an adult found to be in need of protection under the Adult Protection Act. It defines a missing person as someone whose whereabouts remain unknown despite reasonable efforts to locate them, and whose safety and welfare are reasonably feared. The Act contains no alert provision and no reporting requirement of any kind.

1.2 Alerts for missing vulnerable persons in Nova Scotia today

In July 2021, the province gave the RCMP and Halifax Regional Police direct access to Alert Ready, with other police agencies able to join, while the Emergency Management Office continues to issue police-related alerts on request. The province's Policing Standards require each Chief of Police or Commanding

Officer to define a threshold for using Alert Ready, centred on active threats and critical incidents. The alert types the RCMP in Nova Scotia publicly lists as within its authority are civil emergency, animal danger, AMBER Alert and terrorist threat; a vulnerable missing person is not among them.

In practice, the RCMP in Nova Scotia have issued alerts for missing vulnerable persons. In October 2022, a “Vulnerable Missing Person Alert” for a woman in her 70s was directed to Digby, Yarmouth and Annapolis counties, and she was found safe by noon the same day. Further emergency alerts for missing vulnerable persons were issued in Nova Scotia in December 2022, March 2026 and July 2026, the last by the RCMP for a man who was found safe. These cases demonstrate that Nova Scotia police already use geographically targeted public alerts in missing-vulnerable-person investigations.

1.3 The elopement case in Calgary from summer 2026

On July 16, 2026, an 11-year-old nonspeaking autistic boy went missing from a day home in Calgary. Because the case did not meet the usual threshold for an AMBER Alert, an emergency alert was not issued until July 18, two days later, and only after the Government of Alberta granted a case-specific exemption. The search ended on July 29, 2026, when he was found deceased. Under the current framework, a child in this situation reaches the public only through an exemption granted case by case, not through a standing category built for the purpose.

In Nova Scotia, whether a child in this situation reached the public quickly would depend on the threshold of the police agency involved, not on a standing category built for the purpose.

1.4 Other jurisdictions are acting

On August 10, 2026, Alberta announced it would engage law enforcement, disability advocates, and community partners on emergency alert processes for missing vulnerable persons, including a review of its AMBER Alert criteria. PPP took part in Alberta’s listening sessions in fall 2026 and has prepared companion proposals for each province and territory on the same model as this one. A common functional test across provinces would mean that a person who crosses a provincial boundary is assessed the same way on both sides of it.

1.5 The federal context

Bill C-263, the Silver Alert National Framework Act, passed second reading in the House of Commons on June 5, 2026 and is before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. It followed the disappearance of Earl Moberg, an 81-year-old Winnipeg man living with dementia who went missing in December 2023 and was never found. The bill is framed around older adults.

PPP has separately asked the Government of Canada to support a national standard for a Vulnerable Persons Alert that covers children and adults under one functional test. Canada’s alerting standard already contains an event code for a missing vulnerable person, called missingVPer. That code is not currently on the list of events that receive Broadcast Immediate distribution, the treatment that interrupts phones, television and radio. A Nova Scotia amendment would fit the national work and would not depend on it.

2. Problem Statement

People go missing in Nova Scotia every year whose lives are at immediate risk because they cannot recognize danger, say where they are, or get back to safety. The Alzheimer's Association estimates that about 6 in 10 people living with dementia will wander at least once. A 2012 study in Pediatrics found, in a parent-reported U.S. survey, that 598 of 1,218 autistic children (49 percent) had attempted to elope from a safe environment at least once after age four. A 2022 Government of Canada news release states that if a person with Alzheimer's disease is not found within 12 hours, there is a 50 percent chance they will be found injured or dead.

Comparable serious risks can arise from different forms of functional vulnerability, regardless of age or diagnosis. Nova Scotia's coastline, lakes, woodland and winter cold add to them. Police can already reach the public quickly, but there is no common test for when they should, the Act is silent on alerts, and decisions to alert or not are not reported.

3. Policy Objective

To ensure that when any Nova Scotian goes missing who cannot keep themselves safe, and the public could help find them, police have clear legal authority to alert the public quickly, in the right area, with only the information needed, regardless of the person's age or diagnosis.

4. Proposed Solution

PPP recommends a targeted amendment to the Missing Persons Act that adds a Vulnerable Persons Alert, with companion regulations for the operational details. It creates one alert for everyone who cannot keep themselves safe, rather than a separate alert for each condition or age group, and builds on the alerting arrangements Nova Scotia police already use.

4.1 Who qualifies, and when the public is alerted

The test has two parts, which PPP's national proposal calls gates.

Gate	What it triggers	What must be true
Gate 1	The sustained, enhanced police and search response	The person is missing, functionally vulnerable, and at a materially elevated, time-sensitive risk of death or serious bodily harm
Gate 2	The public alert	The public can usefully help, and a defensible alert area exists

Gate 1 describes the enhanced operational response proposed in PPP's national standard. The Nova Scotia legislation provides the complementary provincial alert authority and safeguards.

- Functional vulnerability means a limitation that materially impairs a person's ability to recognize danger, communicate, seek help, or return to safety. Dementia, a medical condition, a

developmental disability, autism spectrum disorder, acquired brain injury and young age are illustrative, non-exhaustive examples.

- The search never waits for the alert decision. Urgent search measures begin on reasonable suspicion, before either gate is formally decided.
- No minimum time missing is required. A child heading toward water should not have to be missing for a set number of minutes.
- Age and diagnosis are never the test. They can inform how the search is run, but they neither qualify nor disqualify anyone.
- Not every vulnerable missing person generates a public alert.

The draft Bill does not use the Act's "vulnerable person" as the test for the alert, because that term turns on a legal arrangement most people will not have. A vulnerable person qualifies wherever the functional test is met. For the alert only, the draft Bill also provides that police need not first have exhausted the reasonable efforts that the Act's definition of a missing person otherwise requires, so that the alert can be part of the first response. That condition continues to apply to search orders and record-access orders.

4.2 Who decides

Under the draft Bill, a police agency activates the alert, as with an AMBER Alert. The alert is then issued by that police agency where it has direct access to Alert Ready, as the RCMP and Halifax Regional Police do, or at its request by another authorized authority such as the Emergency Management Office. Before activating, the police agency must consider whether an alert would itself endanger the person or someone else, or interfere with an investigation.

4.3 Safeguards

- **Geographic targeting.** Alerts are geographically targeted to the smallest defensible area likely to support an effective public response. Broader distribution, including province-wide alerting, requires an operational justification and should be reassessed as new information becomes available.
- **Minimum necessary content.** An alert says only what the public needs to help. A diagnosis is normally excluded, and is disclosed only where necessary and lawful.
- **Adult autonomy and consent.** Where the missing person is an adult, police consider available evidence that the person left voluntarily and can keep themselves safe. A located adult's whereabouts must not be publicly disclosed without consent unless disclosure is otherwise authorized by law.
- **Review and cancellation.** Alerts are reviewed at prescribed intervals and updated when circumstances materially change. The alert is cancelled or updated as soon as the person is located, whatever the outcome, and is cancelled if the conditions for continued alerting are no longer met.
- **Recorded decisions.** Authorization decisions, including decisions not to issue an alert, are documented with the reasons and information available at the time.
- **Public reporting.** Use is reported every year, and audits check both alerts that should not have issued and cases where an alert should have issued and did not. Reporting includes cases where an

alert was considered and not activated. Police agencies report to the Minister of Justice by March 31, and the Minister publishes aggregated reporting by May 31 in a manner that protects personal information and operationally sensitive details. This would be the Act's first reporting requirement.

- **Mandatory review.** The arrangements are reviewed within three years of coming into force.

4.4 How the alert reaches the public

The draft Bill provides for dissemination through the system by which Nova Scotia participates in the National Public Alerting System, in accordance with the requirements that apply to that system. Whether a Vulnerable Persons Alert interrupts phones, television and radio depends on national decisions about the Broadcast Immediate list, which are outside the Legislature's authority. Distribution to phones and broadcasters runs through federally regulated distributors under CRTC requirements. Provincial legal authority does not by itself establish that reach, which is why the national pieces matter. The Nova Scotia amendment supplies the provincial legal authority and decision rules, so that Nova Scotia is ready to use that treatment when it is available and can use its other channels in the meantime.

4.5 The Policing Standards

The Minister of Justice already sets Policing Standards for Alert Ready. Once the regulations are made, that standard could be updated so that every police agency applies the same Vulnerable Persons Alert test.

4.6 Coming into force

The draft Bill comes into force on proclamation, so that provisions can be brought in as the regulations, training and alerting arrangements are ready, and sets a fixed latest date so that the amendment cannot sit unproclaimed indefinitely.

5. Evidence and Precedent

5.1 Manitoba

Manitoba legislated a Silver Alert in 2017. Eligibility is limited to adults: vulnerable persons as defined in Manitoba law, and other adults with a cognitive impairment. The disappearance of Earl Moberg showed a second limit. His family later said publicly that the alert went out through news media and did not reach people who were not already following the news that evening.

5.2 Alberta

Alberta has legislated a Silver Alert twice, in 2017 and again in 2023, with a threshold of 55 years or older. The Silver Alert provisions do not appear in the consolidated Missing Persons Act current to June 11, 2025, and PPP has not found evidence that they have been brought into force.

Legal authority is not the same as reach. A province can legislate an alert without that alert ever reaching a phone. An age-limited alert would also leave out missing children and younger adults who face comparable risks.

5.3 United States

The U.S. Ashanti Alert Act of 2018 created an adult-focused framework based on disability, endangerment or involuntary disappearance. In 2024 the Federal Communications Commission added a Missing and Endangered Persons event code to that country's emergency alert systems. It is the nearest technical parallel to what PPP proposes for missingVPer. The code has been technically enabled since September 2025; whether and how often alert originators use it is not confirmed.

5.4 What no reviewed jurisdiction combines

Pieces of this model exist in other jurisdictions. PPP's review did not find a single jurisdiction that combines age-neutral eligibility, a functional test, and Broadcast Immediate delivery.

No study yet shows that an interrupting phone alert improves recovery for these cases. That is why the draft Bill and regulations require documented activation decisions, annual public reporting and a review within three years.

PPP's companion document, *The Research Behind the Campaign: An Evidence Base for the Vulnerable Persons Alert Proposal*, describes the supporting evidence and its limitations.

6. Stakeholder Consultation (Recommended)

Before introduction, PPP recommends consulting, at minimum:

- The RCMP in Nova Scotia, Halifax Regional Police, and the other municipal police agencies
- The Emergency Management Office, and 9-1-1 and dispatch services
- The Ground Search and Rescue Association of Nova Scotia and its member teams
- Autism Nova Scotia and other autism organizations operating in the province
- The Alzheimer Society of Nova Scotia, and brain injury and other disability service organizations
- Autistic self-advocates, people with lived experience, and family and caregiver representatives, including families of people who have been the subject of an alert
- Mi'kmaw governments and organizations, and rural and coastal communities
- The Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for Nova Scotia
- Nova Scotia broadcasters and telecommunications carriers that distribute alerts

7. Implementation Considerations

- Legislation: one amending Bill adding vulnerable persons alert Sections to the Missing Persons Act, with the Act's first reporting requirement.
- Regulations: regulations covering decision factors, authorization, escalation where a family's request is declined, targeting, dissemination, content, review, co-ordination, records, reporting, audit, post-incident review, training and review within three years.

- Police: designated decision-makers available at all times; training for them and for those who take missing-person reports.
- Alerting: arrangements with the Emergency Management Office for agencies without direct access to Alert Ready, building on current practice.
- National: alignment with federal, provincial and territorial work on the Broadcast Immediate list and a national operational standard.

PPP has drafted a Model First Responder Training & Local Implementation Manual and a Proposed National Vulnerable Persons Alert (VPA) Operational Standard: Discussion Draft, which Nova Scotia may use as starting points.

8. Fiscal Considerations

Nova Scotia already participates in an established public alerting infrastructure, and its police already issue alerts through it directly. This proposal would build on that infrastructure rather than establish a separate alerting network. Additional implementation and operating costs, including consultation, drafting, training, dispatch and alert-authoring changes, and annual reporting, have not yet been determined. PPP has asked the Government of Canada for time-limited federal funding to help provinces and territories align training, dispatch systems and implementation with a national standard.

9. Recommendation

PPP recommends that the Government of Nova Scotia:

- support an amendment to the Missing Persons Act creating a Vulnerable Persons Alert, with eligibility based on functional vulnerability and risk and not on age or diagnosis;
- introduce the amendment as a government bill, building on the Act the Minister of Justice already administers;
- refer the attached draft Bill and draft regulations to legislative counsel as discussion drafts, including the verification points listed in their drafter's notes;
- consult the organizations listed in section 6 before introduction, and update the Alert Ready Policing Standard once the regulations are made; and
- take part in federal, provincial and territorial work on a national Vulnerable Persons Alert standard, so that Nova Scotia's alert can receive Broadcast Immediate distribution when that treatment is available.

PPP requests a written response identifying the provincial officials or bodies responsible for considering these recommendations, the next procedural steps, and an anticipated timeline for an initial decision or further engagement.

Who We Are

Parent Partnership Project Inc. (PPP) is a parent-led not-for-profit organization based in Calgary, Alberta, incorporated under the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act. It produces free resources and pursues

both direct family support and systemic policy advocacy for families of children and adults with disabilities. PPP has advocated on systemic issues facing vulnerable persons since 2018.

Appendices

Appendix A: Draft An Act to Amend Chapter 47 of the Acts of 2012, the Missing Persons Act (Vulnerable Persons Alert)

Appendix B: Draft Vulnerable Persons Alert Regulations under the Missing Persons Act

Both appendices are provided as separate attached documents. This proposal is one of fourteen prepared by PPP: one federal, and one for each of the ten provinces and three territories.

Sources

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- Nova Scotia Department of Justice, Nova Scotia Policing Standards (Alert Ready; AMBER Alert Program):
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- RCMP, How the RCMP in Nova Scotia communicates with the public: <https://rcmp.ca/en/nova-scotia/rcmp-nova-scotia-communicates-public>
- Global News, “Police in Nova Scotia now have direct access to emergency alert system”, July 15, 2021:
<https://globalnews.ca/news/8029813/police-in-nova-scotia-now-have-direct-access-to-emergency-alert-system/>
- Nova Scotia alerts for missing vulnerable persons: Global News, Yarmouth area, October 18, 2022 (<https://globalnews.ca/news/9206827/rcmp-missing-person-alert-yarmouth/>); CBC News, December 7, 2022 (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/1.6676985>); CTV News Atlantic, March 23, 2026 (<https://www.ctvnews.ca/atlantic/nova-scotia/article/emergency-alert-issued-for-missing-vulnerable-nova-man/>) and July 15, 2026 (<https://www.ctvnews.ca/atlantic/nova-scotia/article/vulnerable-person-missing-in-waverley-nova-emergency-alert-issued/>).
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- Manitoba, The Missing Persons Amendment Act (Silver Alert), S.M. 2017, c. 29:
<https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/2017/c02917e.php>
- Bill C-263, Silver Alert National Framework Act, LEGISinfo, Parliament of Canada:
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- U.S. Ashanti Alert Act of 2018; Federal Communications Commission, Report and Order FCC 24-83, adopted August 7, 2024.
- Government of Canada, news release on search and rescue for people living with dementia, June 29, 2022.
- Alzheimer’s Association, public estimate of lifetime wandering.
- Anderson et al., “Occurrence and Family Impact of Elopement in Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders,” *Pediatrics* 130(5), 2012.

- SOREM Broadcast Immediate Events List, Version 2.1, amended May 26, 2022.