

POLICY PROPOSAL

A Vulnerable Persons Alert for Ontario

A proposal to amend the Missing Persons Act, 2018, S.O. 2018, c. 3, Sched. 7, to create a Vulnerable Persons Alert for missing Ontarians of any age who cannot keep themselves safe, connected to the alerting system the province already uses.

Prepared for consideration by the Government of Ontario

Submitted by Parent Partnership Project Inc.

October 2026

Executive Summary

When an Ontarian who cannot keep themselves safe goes missing, Ontario has no standing alert pathway built for that purpose. The Missing Persons Act, 2018 gives police tools to find a missing person, and Ontario issues AMBER Alerts through the national alerting system, but there is no dedicated alert for missing vulnerable persons who do not meet AMBER Alert criteria. An autistic child who bolts toward water, an adult with a brain injury who becomes lost, a parent with dementia who walks out at night: none fits the AMBER Alert, which is built for abductions. A private member's bill to create an alert for vulnerable persons, Bill 74, reached committee in 2024 and died when the Legislature was dissolved in January 2025.

This proposal recommends that Ontario amend the Missing Persons Act, 2018 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 Ontario already uses for AMBER Alerts, and would not require a new system, a new brand of alert for each condition, or new infrastructure.

Two drafts are attached for the government's consideration: an amending Bill and a companion regulation. 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, 2018 provides today

The Missing Persons Act, 2018, in force since July 1, 2019, gives police tools to locate a missing person where no criminal investigation is under way: orders for the production of records, urgent demands for records, and search warrants. It sets rules for disclosing a missing person's personal information, and section 8 requires police services to report each year on their use of urgent demands. The Act contains no alert provision of any kind.

The Act's definition of a missing person has no age restriction, but it applies only once police have been unable to locate the person after reasonable efforts. That condition suits court orders and demands for records. Applied to an alert, it could delay the first public notice in exactly the cases where the first hour matters most.

1.2 Bill 74 (2023)

On March 6, 2023, Monique Taylor, then MPP for Hamilton Mountain, introduced Bill 74, the Missing Persons Amendment Act, 2023. It would have let a police officer ask the Ontario Provincial Police to issue an alert for a missing vulnerable person, using the OPP's existing AMBER Alert authority. The bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy on March 28, 2023 and considered there on May 16, 2024. The Ontario Autism Coalition and the Alzheimer Society of Ontario supported it.

Bill 74 defined a vulnerable person as someone who, because of age, disability or other circumstances, is in a position of dependency on others or at greater risk of harm from a person in a position of trust or

authority. That definition addresses abuse and exploitation. It does not describe a person who wanders and cannot recognize danger. The bill died when the Legislature was dissolved on January 28, 2025, and no successor bill has been introduced.

1.3 Ontario cases

Three Ontario cases have kept this issue in public view. In June 2022, Draven Graham, an 11-year-old autistic boy, wandered from his home in Lindsay and was found in the Scugog River. In December 2022, Shirley Love, an 80-year-old Hamilton woman living with Alzheimer's disease, left her home and was found deceased. In October 2024, Logan Tozer, an autistic 18-year-old from Havelock, was missing for 17 days before the OPP found him alive; his mother called publicly for vulnerable-person alerts. None of these cases involved an abduction, so none fit the AMBER Alert.

1.4 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.

Ontario has the same gap. A child in this situation in Ontario would have no standing alert category built for the purpose.

1.5 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 Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan 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.

1.6 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. An Ontario amendment would fit the national work and would not depend on it.

2. Problem Statement

People go missing in Ontario 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. Ontario's rivers and lakes, winter cold, busy roads and long distances in the north add to them. The province has no standing alert for these cases, and the one bill that proposed one used a test built for a different problem.

3. Policy Objective

To ensure that when any Ontarian 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, 2018 that adds a Vulnerable Persons Alert, with a companion regulation 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.

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 Ontario 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.

For the alert only, the draft Bill provides that police need not first have exhausted the reasonable efforts that the Act's definition of a missing person otherwise requires.

4.2 Who decides

Under the draft Bill, a police service activates the alert, as with an AMBER Alert. The alert is then issued by that police service where it is authorized to issue alerts, or at its request by another authorized authority. In Ontario, AMBER Alerts are issued by the Ontario Provincial Police, and Bill 74 would have used the same arrangement; the draft accommodates it without fixing it in statute. Before activating, the police service 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 services report to the responsible minister, and the

minister publishes aggregated reporting in a manner that protects personal information and operationally sensitive details.

- **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 Ontario 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 Ontario amendment supplies the provincial legal authority and decision rules, so that Ontario is ready to use that treatment when it is available and can use its other channels in the meantime.

4.5 Coming into force

The draft Bill comes into force on proclamation, so that provisions can be brought in as the regulation, 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 regulation 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 Ontario Provincial Police, municipal police services, First Nations police services, and the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police
- Emergency Management Ontario, and 9-1-1 and dispatch services
- Search and rescue organizations
- Ontario Autism Coalition
- Alzheimer Society of Ontario
- Developmental disability, brain injury and other disability service organizations
- Autistic self-advocates, people with lived experience, and family and caregiver representatives, including the families who supported Bill 74
- First Nations, Métis and Inuit governments and organizations, and northern, rural and remote communities
- The Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario
- Ontario broadcasters and telecommunications carriers that distribute alerts

7. Implementation Considerations

- Legislation: one amending Bill adding vulnerable persons alert sections to the Missing Persons Act, 2018.
- Regulation: a regulation 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 OPP and Emergency Management Ontario for issuing, updating and cancelling alerts, building on the AMBER Alert process.
- Translation: French versions of the Bill and regulation, since Ontario statutes and regulations are enacted in both languages.
- 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 Ontario may use as starting points.

8. Fiscal Considerations

Ontario already participates in an established public alerting infrastructure and already issues AMBER Alerts through it. This proposal would build on that infrastructure rather than establish a separate alerting network. Additional implementation and operating costs, including consultation, drafting, translation, 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 Ontario:

- support an amendment to the Missing Persons Act, 2018 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, or support a member who will carry it, so that it does not depend on a private member's bill as Bill 74 did;
- refer the attached draft Bill and draft regulation 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
- take part in federal, provincial and territorial work on a national Vulnerable Persons Alert standard, so that Ontario'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 Missing Persons Amendment Act (Vulnerable Persons Alert), 2026

Appendix B: Draft regulation, Vulnerable Persons Alerts, under the Missing Persons Act, 2018

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

- Missing Persons Act, 2018, S.O. 2018, c. 3, Sched. 7: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/18m03>
- O. Reg. 182/19, General, under the Missing Persons Act, 2018: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/190182>
- Legislative Assembly of Ontario, Bill 74, Missing Persons Amendment Act, 2023 (43rd Parliament, 1st Session), status and text: <https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-43/session-1/bill-74>
- Ontario Data Catalogue, OPP Missing Persons Annual Report Data (section 8 reporting): <https://data.ontario.ca/dataset/opp-missing-persons-annual-report-data>
- Global News, June 2022, on the search for Draven Graham in Lindsay: <https://globalnews.ca/news/8917597/opp-divers-locate-body-missing-lindsay-boy-scugog-river>
- CTV News Toronto, December 2022, on Shirley Love: <https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/missing-80-year-old-hamilton-woman-found-dead-police-1.6198231>
- Global News, October 2024, on Logan Tozer: <https://globalnews.ca/news/10838776/autistic-man-havelock-ontario>
- Alberta Emergency Alert, Critical: AMBER Alert issued by the Calgary Police Service, July 18, 2026, 13:35: https://www.alberta.ca/aea/cap/2026/07/18/2026-07-18T13_35_18-06_00=CalgaryPoliceService=592F10C9-5B22-4056-8F4F-E5214FA29F33.htm
- Government of Alberta announcement of August 10, 2026, as reported by the Red Deer Advocate.
- Alberta, Missing Persons Act, SA 2011, c M-18.5, King's Printer office consolidation current to June 11, 2025; Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2017 (Bill 210); Missing Persons (Silver Alert) Amendment Act, 2022, SA 2023, c. 4 (Bill 204).
- Manitoba, The Missing Persons Amendment Act (Silver Alert), S.M. 2017, c. 29: <https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/2017/c02917e.php>
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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.