

ISSUE 2 2022

# THE AMBER ADVOCATE

50<sup>th</sup> edition

## 1<sup>ST</sup> & GOALS:

**Janell Rasmussen reflects on her first year as AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program Administrator**



**AMBER<sup>®</sup> ALERT**

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*Your story ideas and pictures are welcome! Submit to [ferenbac@fvtc.edu](mailto:ferenbac@fvtc.edu)*

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(Right to left): Janell Rasmussen, then Minnesota State AMBER Alert Coordinator, at the first National AMBER Alert Conference (2003), with Patty Wetterling (mother of Jacob Wetterling), Donna Norris (mother of Amber Hagerman), USDOJ Assistant AG Deborah Daniels, and Tamara Brooks (abduction survivor)

## 1<sup>st</sup> & Goals:

Janell Rasmussen reflects on her first year as AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program Administrator

*By Paul Murphy*

Janell Rasmussen spent more than 20 years working in public safety, developing, implementing, and operating multiple statewide law enforcement programs. In March 2021, she became the AMBER Alert Training and Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) Administrator, following Jim Walters' retirement.

### Early Life and Career

Rasmussen grew up in Mapleton, a small town in southern Minnesota. She was 13-years-old, close to the same age as **Jacob Wetterling** when he was abducted in 1989. That crime left an indelible impression on Rasmussen and everyone in Minnesota.

Rasmussen followed the case through Jacob's mother, Patty Wetterling, and the rest of their family. "She taught me the meaning of real

hope," she said. "She amazed me in her fight to bring Jacob home. I could never have believed how this tragedy could impact my life."

Rasmussen attended the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, and then went to work for the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA). There, she managed the Minnesota Crime Alert Network, a program that started after the abduction and murder of a boy in Eden Prairie. This position gave her the opportunity to work with Wetterling and a small committee to put together a statewide AMBER Alert Plan. Minnesota's AMBER Alert Plan was implemented in 2002 and was the seventh statewide plan in the U.S.

During her time at the BCA, Rasmussen oversaw the Minnesota AMBER Alert Plan, Missing Children's Clearinghouse, Communication &

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Duty Officer Program, the Crimes Against Children in Indian Country Conference, and the President's Initiative on Missing & Unidentified Persons.

Rasmussen continued working with Wetterling, and they attended the first National AMBER Alert Symposium together. Rasmussen said she was heartbroken when Jacob's body was found in 2016, 27 years after his abduction.

"Patty believed every day that Jacob was alive and coming home," Rasmussen said. "She has changed the entire way that law enforcement responds to missing children. She inspired Minnesota and the rest of the world to work together. She is the reason that my and your children are safer today. She is a big reason I fight to bring missing children home."

In 2016, Rasmussen left the BCA to continue her work in child protection as Deputy Director at the Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul & Minneapolis. She helped set up protocols and policies to establish a culture and environment where children are safe and those who hurt children are held accountable.

### Back to the AMBER Alert

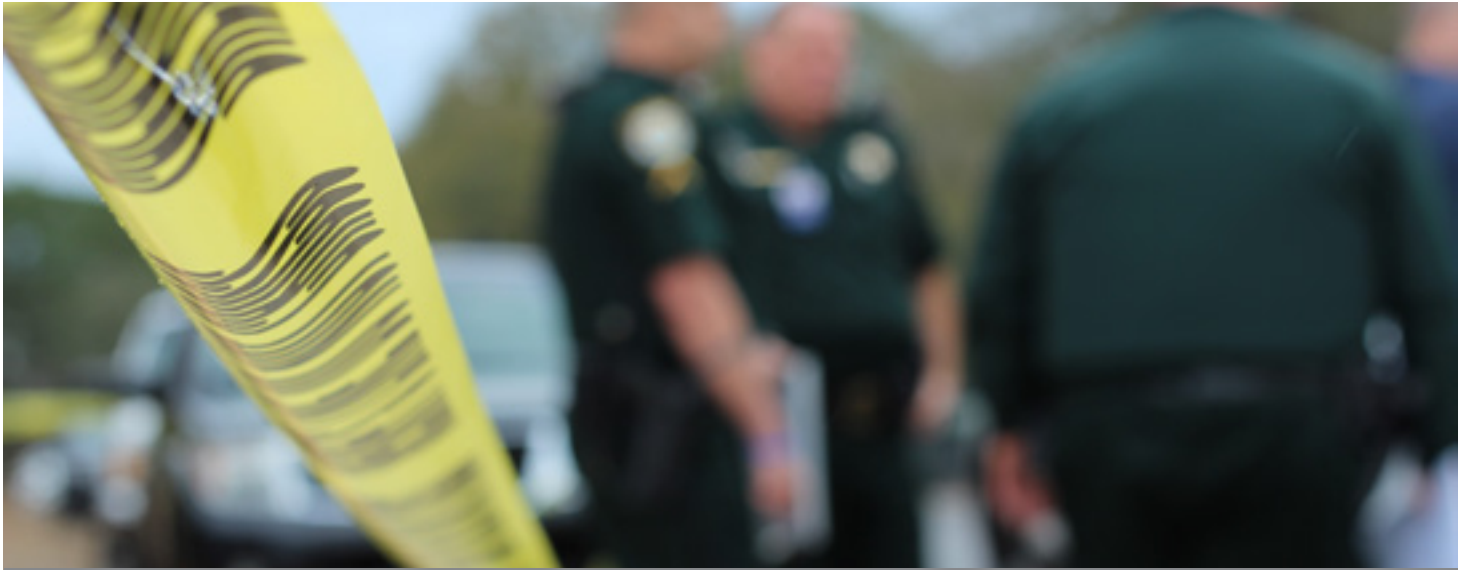
Rasmussen was humbled when Jim Walters approached her to consider the AATTAP Administrator position, because she has worked with so many talented people who have been involved in the effort over the years. Walters not only recognized her passion for protecting children but also her experience in management, training, and technical assistance.

"The thought of any child suffering and any parent having to endure that pain forces me to work as hard as possible to look for strategies to do better for our children," she said. "Every child deserves the right to grow up in a safe environment where they can learn, play, and live without being hurt. We need to work hard every day to make that happen."

Rasmussen has been in her new position for a year. *The AMBER Advocate* asked her to reflect on that time and learn what she hopes to accomplish in the future.

### **You have been involved in the AMBER Alert program since the beginning—how do you think AMBER Alerts have changed the way we think about missing and abducted children?**

AMBER Alert has brought attention and awareness to the public about the issue of missing and endangered children. Lawmakers recognize the significance of these events and have supported legislation that provides funding and resources for training and technical assistance for law enforcement. This training helps prepare officers to respond to a child abduction. We have supported law enforcement and their partners across the U.S. to establish Child Abduction Response Teams (CARTs). AATTAP's training and resources have ensured CARTs are carefully and comprehensively informed, trained, and positioned to do the important work to sustain their programs. And for teams who choose to pursue US-DOJ-AATTAP Certification, we guide that process, helping them prepare for certification,



Northwest Florida CART Certification exercise held in February 2018.

and performing rigorous assessment onsite in coordination with CART program leadership and participating agencies. This solid framework sets CART programs on the path to maintain certification via an annual recertification process AATTAP designed and administers.

It is never a good thing for a law enforcement agency to realize the critical importance of readiness to respond to missing and abducted child incidents for the first time during an actual event. This in and of itself has changed the way we think today. We also know that AMBER Alerts have thwarted many abductions. When an abductor sees the alert being broadcast and gets scared and drops the child off – that is a success. Most important, the AMBER Alert program has changed the way we work together, and strengthened the way we collaborate with others for one common good.

The AMBER Alert Program originally brought law enforcement and the media together

to work in partnership. That collaboration quickly expanded to include departments of transportation. Today, the partnerships at work in AMBER Alert programs across the nation span pages in AMBER Alert plans and related information. So many organizations and companies want to support the AMBER Alert Program, including state lotteries, electronic billboard companies, truckers' associations, and other stakeholders that post, share, and distribute information when an AMBER Alert occurs.

**Reflecting upon your first year as the AATTAP Administrator, and what you've brought to the position from the successes and guidance of your predecessors, what do you think you uniquely bring to the AATTAP as its leader and 'CEO'?**

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I am very fortunate to follow two previous AATTAP Administrators whose passion and diligent work in protecting children I greatly respect. I feel my work as an AMBER Alert Coordinator brings a unique perspective to the program. I have done the same work as our state AMBER Alert Coordinators and Clearinghouse Managers and I know many of the unique issues they face. I also bring insight into working with victims and survivors, given my past work.

I have been blessed while growing up, and, in my career, to have mentors who have taught me to lead with compassion and dedication, with strength and persistence. I feel I bring leadership qualities that highlight that no one person can do this alone, but rather, it takes a team of individuals coming together to be successful. You must allow others to contribute, to lead, to add value, and share their strengths and expertise. Without this incredible support and strong partnerships, you will get nowhere; yet together you can accomplish great things. I know the best leaders aren't the ones who know everything; they are the ones who continue to learn each day.

### **What do you think were the biggest successes for AATTAP in 2021? Is there a specific program event or accomplishment that stands out for you?**

I have witnessed so many accomplishments. Overcoming the challenges and restrictions of COVID-19 has had a significant impact on our ability to continue providing our core services. With shutdowns and travel restrictions, our entire AATTAP team had to pivot rapidly – working incredibly hard to

transition effectively from providing onsite training and technical assistance (T/TA) in the field, to 100% virtual delivery of T/TA events. That work constituted a complete shift of business processes, resource management, and how we work together.

Moreover, the readiness of our AMBER Alert partners across the nation to work with us in this 'virtual journey,' rapidly shifting from being on the road, in the field, to being fully 'online,' made all the difference. We have seen a great willingness to approach training and meetings in new ways, and have welcomed amazing participation with our events during the pandemic. All of us in AATTAP – and across our partner disciplines – learned that even as the world 'shut down,' and with restrictions everywhere, children are still being abducted. Law enforcement still needs to respond. And we still need to provide our T/TA so they are prepared to respond.

We also held our first "virtual" AMBER Alert Symposium in 2021. The symposium had great attendance and important topics, and while we would have rather done this in person, it was a complete success. We had the technical support to accomplish what was needed and exceptional speakers, topics, and discussion rooms where participants could discuss and collaborate on those topics 'face-to-face' via our Zoom and Whova platform integration. We gleaned important takeaways from the event, and actively incorporated them into our 2nd virtual symposium held in March 2022. And with future events, we will ensure we continue to build an even greater array of content and engagement activities that fully represent our partner audiences.

Even with the symposium's success, one of our biggest accomplishments was the first ever "virtual" Family Roundtable event. In the past, we brought together the families of missing and murdered children to learn from their experiences in-person to enhance our training. But with COVID-19 travel and gathering restrictions, that simply was not an option. We were able to partner with Arizona State University to facilitate these discussions, through carefully designed and respectfully administered one-on-one virtual interviews.

We learned so much from this process, particularly that family members respond differently when they're in the comfort of their own home. This is a safe place for them, which makes it easier for them to share more easily and openly. We have heard from some family members that the anxiety of traveling somewhere to talk about the most horrific event of their lives can be too much, and this format provided a better environment. So going forward, when restrictions are lifted, we will consider a combined approach to these events.

### **Will training go back to what it was before the pandemic? Or will it be a mixture of live-virtual training, self-paced eLearning, and classroom/onsite training?**

We are continually evaluating each area of training we provide. We know our symposium is most effective in person because AMBER Alert Coordinators and Clearinghouse managers have an opportunity to more fully network and share information on cases, best practices, or issues they face in their states. I know first-hand from my past work

the impact that relationship building has on the effectiveness of the program. From my relationship with the Utah AMBER Alert Coordinator that resulted in the successful recovery of a child abducted from Minnesota and taken to Utah, to cases involving Iowa, Wisconsin, Canada, and others – I know that relationships developed from working together prior to an abduction can have an incredible impact on the recovery of a missing child.

### **What are the major accomplishments of the AMBER Alert in Indian Country initiative since you joined the team? And what remains to be done?**

We know our efforts in Indian Country have been successful, as we are witnessing children being safely recovered because of the issuance of AMBER Alerts. However, COVID-19 restrictions have made our work in carrying out T/TA established through the [2018 Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act](#) very difficult. There are unique challenges, and in many cases outright barriers, to meeting virtually with tribal community members. Internet coverage, bandwidth and devices needed to connect virtually can be limited or altogether unavailable. This has impacted not only our training, but also our efforts to help tribes develop and implement their AMBER Alert Plans.

While this has been difficult, we continue to push forward where we can. We are working to combat these issues by providing specially designed [Technology Toolkits](#) for the tribes. These toolkits provide technology and

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(From left): Janell Rasmussen with Tyesha Wood, Pamela Foster, and Chelsa Seciwa at an AMBER Alert in Indian Country event.

resources to support the tribes' ability to attend virtual events, and provide critically important resources for operational response when a child goes missing or is abducted in Indian Country. We look forward to providing the critical training needed in Indian Country in person.

We need to continue our work in Indian Country to ensure all tribes have access to the AMBER Alert program. If you have heard Pamela Foster, the warrior mother who led the grassroots efforts to establish AMBER Alert in Indian Country after her daughter Ashlynn's abduction and murder, you know the importance of these efforts. Our endeavors moving forward are focused on the work that Pamela started – engaging tribal leaders and government officials across the country to implement AMBER Alert.

### **What are your top goals for strengthening AMBER Alert planning and strategy with our border countries Canada and Mexico?**

We have been working virtually this past year with both Canada and Mexico. We have been successful in working with Canada on virtual training and meetings. We also held the first virtual training for Mexico and worked with a translation service. Over the next year, we plan to partner with the McCain Institute on our work related to sex trafficking in Mexico. We have reached out to the Vice President's Office for assistance with the 'Collaboration on Interagency Agreement with Mexico' to help resolve more than 82,000 missing persons cases there. We also will use our past work, experience, and relationships with Mexican



officials, and our established law enforcement training curricula, to continue training law enforcement in the country.

Additionally, we will continue to collaborate on the best plans of action and training for when children are taken across the border, in either direction, to respond with established protocols.

### **What will be important in the coming years for working with international AMBER Alert partners?**

Our work with our international partners is incredibly important. We continue to collaborate with the International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children (ICMEC) to provide training and technical assistance. We have learned our training is beneficial to our international partners, and in turn, we learn about different trends, best practices, and issues they are experiencing so we can collaboratively find solutions.

### **AATTAP's work with human trafficking (HT) and child sex trafficking (CST) in training related to endangered missing and at-risk youth has grown over the years. How do you see this continuing to evolve as AATTAP works to ensure law enforcement understand the risk factors, investigative processes, and critically-important victim needs in the future?**

We have former Dallas Police Department Child Sex Trafficking experts Byron Fassett and Cathy De La Paz on our AATTAP team.

They provide us with a unique opportunity to incorporate these topics into our training and technical assistance areas where appropriate. This is an area that continues to grow and we will provide all T/TA requested, and partner on plans to combat CST.

### **What do you hope can be accomplished in 2022 for both AATTAP and AIIC?**

Our focus throughout 2022 is to develop action plans that will result in the greatest success for safely recovering missing and abducted children. We recently began the "50 state" initiative in which we are working with each state AMBER Alert team to review existing plans and discuss ways we can provide resources to help improve plans, processes, and programs. These meetings have been critical during a time when we have not been able to work together in person. The need to continually evaluate our programs at a state and national level is crucial to the AMBER Program's growth, success, and effectiveness.

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**Children Safely Recovered  
with the Help of**



as of May 1, 2022

# 2022 SYMPOSIUM IN REVIEW

## A Virtual Success: The 2022 AMBER Alert and AMBER Alert in Indian Country Virtual Symposium Focuses on Innovative Ways to Find Missing and Abducted Children



By Denise Gee Peacock

At the close of the 2022 AMBER Alert and AMBER Alert in Indian Country Virtual Symposium March 29-30, family survivor Amy Bloxom shared two unsettling details – ones that no doubt strengthened participants' resolves to keep people from ever enduring what Amy's family has. The day of her talk, March 30, marked 12 years since her 12-year-old son, Justin – “a very happy, trusting, innocent young man” – was lured by an adult male sex

offender pretending to be a 15-year-old girl. Perversely, the killer called the fictitious teen “Amber.”

Bloxom, a native of Stonewall, Louisiana, detailed her family's loss, search for justice, and ongoing advocacy work with gripping detail. “Every day I want Justin home with me. I miss that smile. I miss his goofiness. I miss the life we all had together,” she said.

## SOME MEMORABLE TAKEAWAYS FROM THE 2022 SYMPOSIUM PRESENTERS

*“Thankfully our CART procedures protected us when it came down to liability and accountability.”*

**Lieutenant Stacie Lick**, Gloucester County (New Jersey) Prosecutor's Office

*The Golden State Killer case involved more than \$10 million over its 43 year-span; 15 law enforcement agencies, 650 detectives, and 200,000 personnel hours; more than 300 people having their DNA swabbed, and 8,000 subjects reviewed in CODIS – with zero hits. Yet thanks to genetic genealogy, it took \$217 and five people to find the killer: Joseph James DeAngelo Jr. “That's the real value of genetic genealogy – efficiency and a lack of privacy invasion.”*

**Sergeant Eric Kovanda**, Carlsbad (California) Police Department

AATTAP Administrator Janell Rasmussen later assured Amy that Justin would not be forgotten.

“Everyone with us today is committed to protecting children from crimes like the one your son experienced,” she said. “We want you to know we will work hard on behalf of Justin and the other children who are not here today to fight. His memory will live on in the work we all do to protect children.”

The powerful moment was one of many experienced by hundreds of symposium participants, AMBER Alert coordinators, missing persons clearinghouse managers, law enforcement officers, telecommunications personnel, Child Abduction Response Team (CART) members, emergency management and other child protection professionals from across the nation, including tribal nations and communities. The event focused on 30 topics, touched on more than a dozen cases, and offered hundreds of lessons and tips. The virtual symposium was delivered using

the Whova platform with Zoom integration, allowing for a dynamic experience in which participants could log into the event in advance of the start date, share a welcome/ice-breaker message and reply to others’ welcomes, view the full agenda, and create a custom agenda of sessions they wanted to attend (both plenary and concurrent tracks). They also could view presenters’ biographical information, contribute to polls and discussion board topics, and visit any session to view its recording on-demand for a two-week period following the event’s conclusion. The Zoom integration allowed a livestream of each session, complete with all of Zoom’s advanced interaction tools, such as chat, live polling, feedback indicators, and breakout rooms. Each session could be viewed within the Whova platform, affording participants the convenience of a single login for the event, where they could easily move from one presentation to another, be it live or live streamed.

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*“There are more kids on TikTok right now than there are on the playground. That’s also where sex offenders and traffickers are going to recruit their victims. The good news is that the same technology used by predators can lead to their downfalls based on the evidence preserved, even if they think they’ve deleted it.”*

**Blaine Phillips**, Agent in Charge, Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics

*Children who experience “adultification” are looked upon “as having made a choice — even if they were abducted, lured away, and/or exploited. Their cases are treated differently. They’re more likely to be disciplined and more vulnerable to discretionary authority. We’re not giving them support nor helping them utilize the resources they need. It gets even worse if they identify as LGBTQ+.”*

**Tina Bigdeli**, NCMEC Program Manager, Outreach



# 2022 SYMPOSIUM IN REVIEW

## A Virtual Success: The 2022 AMBER Alert and AMBER Alert in Indian Country Virtual Symposium Focuses on Innovative Ways to Find Missing and Abducted Children

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"The pandemic continues to change the way in which we work. It has created both opportunities and obstacles, but it has not changed the fact that children go missing," Rasmussen said. "They need us to remain committed in our work to provide law enforcement training and technical assistance to ensure they are safely recovered."

"You don't have to look far to find examples of how your work and the AMBER Alert network is making a difference. At the start of 2022, more than 1,100 children had been safely recovered because of AMBER Alerts," said Amy Solomon, Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs.

Attendees explored current obstacles encountered by their state, tribal, and regional emergency alerting programs, shared best practices, discussed innovative programs, resources, and tools to help support their work and make AMBER Alerts more effective.

Discussions focused on such topics as creating and sustaining Child Abduction Response Teams (CARTs); genetic genealogy; Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) strategies and advancements; must-know technology for combatting child sex trafficking; initiatives to reduce the alarming number of missing and murdered indigenous women and children; a program to equip Indian Country law enforcement agencies with new DOJ-sponsored technology toolkits; how to

### MORE MEMORABLE TAKEAWAYS FROM THE 2022 SYMPOSIUM PRESENTERS

*"To serve and protect — that should include yourself. It used to be that we were expected to hold everything in, to keep it inside, shrug it off. Well, that doesn't work."*

**Carol Brusca**, SHIFT Wellness therapist

*"The unidentified need us to give them their names back."*

**Carri Gordon**, Washington State AMBER Alert Coordinator and Missing Persons Clearinghouse Manager / AATTAP Region 5 Liaison

*"Native women on tribal lands are murdered at an extremely high rate – in some communities, more than 10 times the national average – according to research funded by the DOJ. And due to jurisdictional challenges, the disappearances can be hard to track and prosecute."*

**Ingrid Cumberlidge**, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) Coordinator, U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Alaska

effectively work with the media and interview high-risk endangered children; understanding disparities in media coverage related to missing and murdered children of color and white children; reviewing the latest findings from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC); and opportunities for AMBER Alert and child protection partner collaboration via regional breakout sessions.

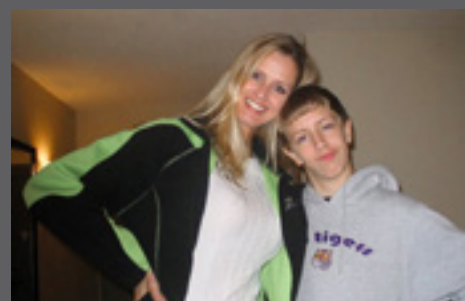
Rasmussen closed the symposium by thanking participants for their attendance and recognizing the AMBER Alert Symposium team, noting, "A symposium like this, especially a virtual one, does not happen without the planning, preparation, and work of a lot of people." She also thanked "our partners at OJJDP, who have assisted us with the planning

and approvals for this event. This would not be possible without their commitment to protecting children."

Rasmussen then commended the symposium's participants. "Your attendance was critical as we move forward with this program," she said. "We value your input and suggestions as we continually look for ways to implement initiatives to help you address issues you face every day in the field."

*After learning her son had been aggressively lured online by a stranger, "There's a part of me that asks, 'Justin, why didn't you just think?' But a detective told me, 'Amy, he was 12 years old. You and I may see through manipulation, but he was too young to fully understand it.'"*

**Amy Bloxom**, mother of 12-year-old Justin Bloxom, abducted and murdered in 2012



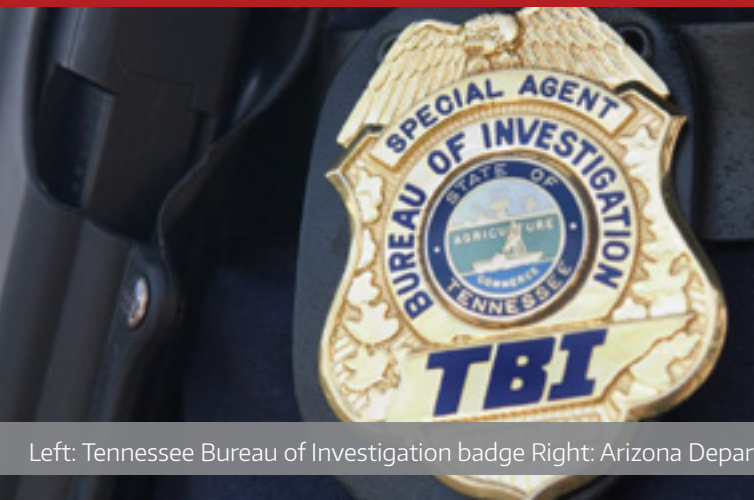
*"We as a Native society make efforts to work through historical trauma by confronting it. We try to understand it and attempt to ease the pain of it. And we want to surpass the cycles of trauma to give our children better futures."*

**Valerie Bribiescas**, AMBER Alert in Indian Country Liaison

*"Always thank the community for its support. They are the ultimate conduit to solving crimes."*

**Mark MacKizer**, Special Agent (Retired), Federal Bureau of Investigation

# FRONT LINES: A MULTI-STATE SUCCESS STORY



Left: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation badge Right: Arizona Department of Public Safety State Trooper vehicle

## **Citizen makes fateful call after multiple state AMBER Alert partners work together to recover missing Tennessee children**

Authorities honor Good Samaritan who had a “gut feeling” about the children she saw on a California beach

*By Paul Murphy*

It began as an ordinary situation that progressively got worse. The case of missing 3-year-old Noah Clare started on November 7, 2021, after his non-custodial father didn't bring him back to his home in Gallatin, Tennessee.

The next day, Noah's mother, Amanda Ennis, contacted the Gallatin police to get an emergency motion to suspend parenting time and a temporary restraining order against Noah's father, Jacob Clare. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation (TBI) issued an Endangered Child Alert for Noah Clare and a 16-year-old cousin accompanying him.

Following a law enforcement investigation in Kentucky, authorities learned Clare might be carrying a handgun and military-style rifle. They also found he may have planned his actions months ahead of the incident. Investigators also were concerned about

Clare's relationship with his teenage niece. Authorities decided to charge Clare with kidnapping and the TBI issued an AMBER Alert November 16.

“Tennessee had law enforcement officers and agents working non-stop during the investigation in order to locate Noah safely,” said Shelly Smitherman, TBI Assistant Special Agent in Charge and Tennessee's AMBER Alert Coordinator.

Arizona also issued an AMBER Alert that same day after the suspect's vehicle was seen near the Arizona-California border.

“Tennessee did a fantastic job with this AMBER Alert. They called and coordinated with us as soon as they had credible information that the subject was heading to Arizona,” said Chrystal Moore, Arizona AMBER Alert Coordinator and Arizona Department of Public Safety Trooper.



"We were able to utilize the provided information from Tennessee to show the vehicle had traveled into our state."

## California Checks In

More information came forward about the suspect's vehicle being abandoned in San Clemente, California, on November 11 and towed two days later. With the new details, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) issued an Endangered Missing Advisory, also known as an Ashanti Alert, on November 16.

The **Ashanti Alert** is similar to an AMBER Alert in that it can target the media and public in a specific geographic area but can also be used for missing people between the ages of 18 and 64. The alert also provides flyers on social media with details about the alleged suspect and victim.

CHP Sergeant and California AMBER Alert Supervisor Ed Bertola and his team spent the entire day gathering details and monitoring the situation. "We are committed to doing whatever we can to recover children," said Bertola. "The name of the alert isn't what makes it important. It's the child. That's our mantra."

At the same time, Bertola was trying to balance the effort to rescue the child with the impact the notifications could have on the public. He feared oversaturating people with alerts.

Because of the timing and the lack of certain details, CHP did not send the message to cellphones via a Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) or broadcast. Even without these two specific tools, the CHP led California's effort to find the children, employing other investigative actions and resources, including significant dedication of personnel hours.

## Chance Sighting

On November 18, Julia Bonin saw a boy matching Noah's description on a flyer at an Orange County, California, beach. She was on her way to drop off her son at school but trusted her instincts to help local deputies make contact.

"This feeling just didn't go away. It was very much instinctual and very much a gut feeling that just stayed with me," Bonin told a reporter.

Acting on her tip, law enforcement safely recovered the children and took Clare into custody.

"There is no greater reward in this job when a child is found safe," said Smitherman.

Five months later, the Orange County Sheriff's Department honored Bonin at a ceremony that included a surprise appearance from Amanda Ennis and her son Noah.

"It's been torture. It's been a nightmare," Ennis said after reuniting with Noah. "It's something that I would never wish my worst enemy to go through."

Clare was charged with kidnapping and multiple sexual abuse charges. A woman who told authorities she was Clare's "spiritual advisor" has also been charged with a felony for allegedly helping plan the crime.

## Lessons Learned

- **Information about missing child cases can evolve.** What began as a custodial dispute case, would soon become an abduction plan, guns, and an improper relationship with a teenage

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# FRONT LINES: A MULTI-STATE SUCCESS STORY

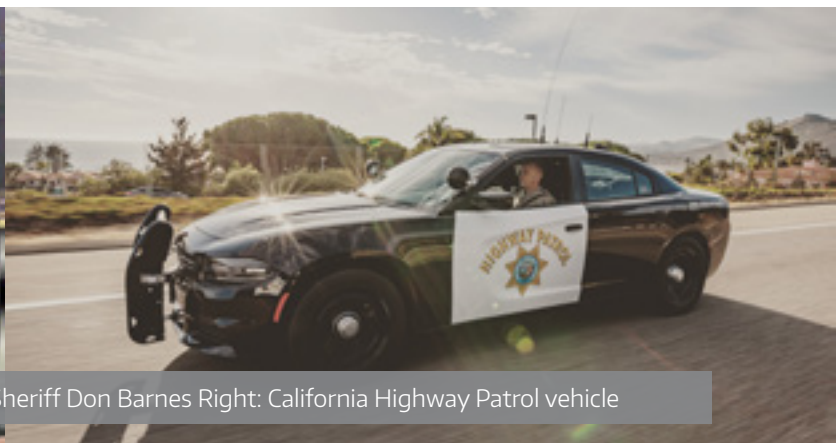
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girl. Although the decision to issue an AMBER Alert occurred several days after the initial report to law enforcement, investigators in Tennessee and Arizona went to work within hours, with California ultimately joining the effort. The three-state team would employ an array of investigative strategies and tools to find Noah.

- o **Noah's Law:** In March of 2022, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee signed HB2354 into law. "Noah's Law," enhances the process to issue AMBER Alerts involving custodial issues. Under the new law, after a child has been missing for 48 hours, a judge can issue an order declaring the child to be in imminent danger, clearing the way for an AMBER Alert.
- **An AMBER Alert isn't the only tool to find missing children.** "Ultimately, the person who identified the involved parties recognized them from a flyer, which is one of the most rudimentary things we do," Bertola said. "Think of all of the electronic messaging and next generation digital tools we have; and yet it came down to a flyer somebody saw while walking along a beach. There is no question that the EAS and WEA are important tools in our arsenal, but even when they aren't used, we still have

ways to provide actionable information to help communities engage in the mission."

- **Relationships matter.** Both the Tennessee and California AMBER Alert coordinators credit the importance of knowing AMBER Alert partners *before* an alert is needed. "We are very connected with our AMBER Alert partners and have developed those relationships by working and training together," Smitherman said. "Both California and Arizona were so gracious and willing to assist us."
- **Social media can help and hurt an investigation.** The children were ultimately found because of a flyer created using a social media post. However, the case had a large social media following outside of law enforcement that included false information and posts that did not support investigation efforts. Monitoring social media to ensure information is posted accurately is critical to keeping the public updated with viable and actionable information to help law enforcement.



Left: Julia Bonin with Orange County Sheriff Don Barnes Right: California Highway Patrol vehicle

# AMBER ALERT INTERNATIONAL

## Serbia joins AMBER Alert Europe

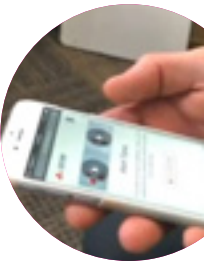
The Republic of Serbia signed a Memorandum of Understanding on February 24, 2022, with AMBER Alert Europe to help the country improve efforts to find missing and abducted children. AMBER Alert Europe now has 43 members. "You can never be sure enough you have done everything you could to save your youngest and dearest; the initiative of AMBER Alert is precious, valuable and important," said Aleksander Vulin, Serbia Minister of the Interior.



The Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vulin, and the Chairman of the AMBER Alert Europe Foundation, Frank Hoen, sign the Memorandum of Understanding in Belgrade, February 24, 2022.

## Canada tests its public alerting system

Canada tested Alert Ready, the country's public alerting system, on May 4, 2022, during its Emergency Preparedness Week. The system is used for AMBER Alerts and other life-threatening emergencies such as tornadoes and wildfires. The test message was sent to television, radio, and compatible wireless devices. Canada regularly tests the system to confirm proper operation and create optimal preparedness in case of a real emergency.



## Students and police investigators from 14 countries work on cold cases involving missing children and child homicides

More than 60 British university students joined Australia's Murdoch University and police agencies from 14 countries to work on six cold cases involving missing children and child homicides. The four-month effort was part of the third International Cold Case Analysis Project (ICCAP). The students' findings led detectives to further investigate one of the cases; and last year, the project prompted investigators to exhume the body of "Gentleman John Doe" – helping identify an unknown man buried 30 years ago.





# AMBER ALERT IN INDIAN COUNTRY



## **Washington launches the first Indigenous Alert system in the U.S.**

On March 31, 2022, Washington Governor Jay Inslee signed into law the nation's first Indigenous Alert for missing Native Americans. The alert will send messages to law enforcement, news agencies, social media, and electronic highway signs. The alert is designed to address a much needed and improved response to the high rate of missing and murdered indigenous women. Women in some tribal communities face a murder rate 10 times higher than the national average, according to the Department of Justice. Additional efforts are underway to help indigenous communities from the DOJ's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People Task Force, which is led by the Washington Attorney General's Office.



## **Cherokee Police in North Carolina receive AMBER Alert toolkit**

The Cherokee Indian Police Department in Cary, North Carolina, received an AMBER Alert in Indian Country (AAIIC) Technology Toolkit that includes a computer, camera and other digital technology resources to help law enforcement officers and investigators in missing and abducted child cases. The Toolkit initiative is funded through AAIIC work that is part of the Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act. AATTAP Administrator Janell Rasmussen said the award recognizes the evolving cooperation between state and tribal agencies. "It's unusual to see such a phenomenal partnership between a state agency and a tribe, and there is great work being done here," Rasmussen said.



## **White Earth Nation receives \$1.2 million donation for Boys & Girls Clubs**

The White Earth Nation in Minnesota received a \$1.2 million donation for its Boys & Girls Clubs. The gift from author and philanthropist MacKenzie Scott is part of a \$281 million donation to 62 clubs across the nation. "Today young people face an unprecedented number of obstacles to their success and well-being," said White Earth Nation Boys & Girls Club Interim Chief Executive Officer James Hvezda. "Studies show a lack of access to technology, positive mentors and guidance, food insecurity and other critical factors can cause long-term setbacks and trauma for millions of young people."

## Indigenous New Mexico women address Congress about the murder of Native females

Two Indigenous women from New Mexico spoke before a U.S. Congress subcommittee in March 2022 about the high number of murdered Native American women and relatives. Angel Charley, of the Laguna Pueblo, spoke about the failures of the federal government to stop “a crisis” of missing and murdered Indigenous individuals. Pamela Foster, a Navajo and mother of murder victim Ashlynn Mike, said tribes have been hampered during the pandemic from implementing AMBER Alert systems. “Thousands of stories have fallen through the cracks of the judicial system,” Foster said.



## Navajo Nation holds awareness walk for missing and murdered relatives

About 150 Navajo Nation members took part in a two-mile walk in March 2022 to raise awareness of the growing problem of missing and murdered Diné (Navajo) people. The march in Kayenta, Arizona, was sponsored by the Navajo Nation Council. “We are marching to bring a voice to the families searching for missing relatives and to tell the stories of the victims that never returned home,” said Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown. “In the Navajo language, there is no word for human trafficking, the missing, and the inhumane violence experienced.” Brown said Navajo men must reclaim traditional teachings to protect women from violence.



# FACES OF THE AMBER ALERT

## Oklahoma AMBER Alert Coordinator uses his long career in law enforcement to save abducted children

By Paul Murphy



Oklahoma AMBER Alert Coordinator & Oklahoma Highway Patrol Captain Ronnie Hampton

Captain Ronnie Hampton began serving as Oklahoma's AMBER Alert Coordinator in March 2020. Hampton also serves as the Commander of the Property and Evidence Division at the Oklahoma Highway Patrol (OHP). He comes from a family of law enforcement; his grandfather and father were both police officers and elected sheriffs. Hampton's own career in law enforcement began in 1988, working as a confinement officer, as well as an officer for both tribal and municipal police departments. He has worked the past 25 years with the OHP.

### WHAT IS UNIQUE TO YOUR AMBER ALERT PROGRAM AND WHAT HELPS MAKE IT SUCCESSFUL?

An all-hands-on-deck approach is the key

to our success. Our media relations team is heavily involved from the moment we issue an AMBER Alert. We also implement a Signal One Plan, which involves having all state troopers in the 77 counties of Oklahoma stop their routine patrols and position themselves at strategic locations statewide to watch for the suspect's vehicle. We also ask our troop commanders to work with their sheriffs and police chiefs to cover other locations where the suspect might be stopped and captured.

### WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO FIND MISSING AND ABDUCTED CHILDREN?

I'm motivated by the thought of the trauma a parent goes through when their child is missing. It is critical for parents to know every possible avenue is being covered to return their child to them safe and alive.

### WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FACE IN MAINTAINING A STRONG AND EFFECTIVE AMBER ALERT PROGRAM?

One of the most pressing challenges is the mass exodus of professionals in law enforcement who are retiring or leaving the profession. Adding to that challenge is the importance of constantly ensuring the newly promoted officers who take their positions are trained to respond effectively to missing and abducted child cases.

### WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE HAPPEN WITH YOUR AMBER ALERT PROGRAM IN THE FUTURE?

I would like to increase criminal intelligence positions; we can always have more than one crime analyst working intel and vetting leads from the outset of the case. For



example, one component of intelligence analysis is critical in these cases: Today's technology requires experts to begin cellphone tracking within minutes.

**WHAT IS ONE OF YOUR MOST MEMORABLE SUCCESS STORIES IN WORKING A MISSING CHILD CASE? HOW DID THE AMBER ALERT SUPPORT THE OUTCOME? WHAT WERE IMPORTANT LESSONS LEARNED?**

About a year ago, a suicidal and homicidal non-custodial mother was released from jail. She immediately traveled to her father's house and shot him in the head as he answered his front door. Her two children were next to her father and she took them to an unknown destination.

Our intel said she would murder her children and then commit suicide, so time was critical. We used the Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system to issue a statewide AMBER Alert. The mother made a stop and a person who received the WEA saw her and called police.

The suspect then fled in the vehicle with her children. We issued another, more targeted WEA alert with the most recent information. Within 10 minutes, a local officer in the next county spotted the vehicle and started a 10-mile chase, eventually recovering both children safely.

In those situations I find the WEA sometimes reaches the on-duty officers more quickly than the dispatch center can disseminate a general broadcast over the radio.

We were told the children would likely not be recovered alive. The emotions I felt

when I called the sheriff to let him know the children were safe was one of the best feelings in the world.

**HOW HAVE YOUR CAREER AND LIFE EXPERIENCES, INCLUDING YOUR WORK AS AN AMBER ALERT COORDINATOR, STRENGTHENED YOUR COMMITMENT TO HELPING ENDANGERED MISSING AND ABDUCTED CHILDREN?**

Being in law enforcement the past 34 years, I thought I knew nearly everything there was to know. But the classes I've taken through NCJTC and NCMEC have opened my eyes. I also am learning from other states about programs they are doing for endangered and missing children. This knowledge has strengthened my commitment to ensure

Oklahoma learns from all these robust, outstanding programs, and implements them for our citizens.

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHER AMBER ALERT PARTNERS?**

Educate, educate, and educate. Start training the 911 operators, line-level officers, search and rescue teams, law enforcement administrators, and detectives on how quickly information needs to flow from the first moment a child is reported missing.

We should take every opportunity as AMBER Alert Coordinators to talk to law enforcement groups and conferences. It is important for everyone to know how the state's AMBER Alert program works.

**"Educate,  
educate, and  
educate."**

# AMBER ALERT BRIEFS



## TEXAS OFFICERS HONORED FOR SAVING TWO KIDNAPPED CHILDREN

Two Kilgore, Texas, officers were honored April 10, 2022, for rescuing two children from an alleged kidnapper. After an AMBER Alert was issued, Lieutenant Joey Chitwood and Corporal Joey Johnston began checking local hotels and spotted the suspect. They arrested the man, who was believed to be armed, and safely recovered the children, ages 10 and 11. Commendations for the officers were signed by the Kilgore mayor, city manager, and police chief.



## KIDNAPPING SURVIVOR JOINS MOTHER OF MISSING TEEN TO SPEAK AT OHIO AMBER ALERT CONFERENCE

Natalee Holloway has been missing more than 17 years after disappearing during a high school graduation trip in Aruba. Natalie's mother, Beth Holloway, spoke at the Northeast Ohio AMBER Alert Conference March 25, 2022, about the desperation and panic she felt when her daughter went missing. "I think about in Natalee's case the difference it would've made if we had a 911 number to call, if we would have had an AMBER Alert," Holloway said.

The case continues to spark international attention. A suspect has been named, but Natalee's whereabouts are still a mystery.

Gina DeJesus also spoke at the conference about how she was kidnapped as a teen in 2002. She was held for more than a decade with two other young women before they escaped from the "house of horrors." "I have had to learn a lot since I came home. I take it day by day," she said. DeJesus has since started the "Cleveland Missing" organization to help find and support missing people.



## MISSOURI ENHANCES AMBER ALERT SYSTEM SO ALERTS ARE MORE TARGETED

The Missouri State Highway Patrol can now send targeted AMBER and Blue Alerts to people living near the incident. The location-specific alerts are part of an upgrade to the state's AMBER Alert system. Troopers hope the targeted alerts will help the public pay more attention to the notifications, and law enforcement is still able to send statewide alerts if they are needed.

## NEW JERSEY MISSING CHILD INVESTIGATION UNCOVERS CHILD SEX TRAFFICKING NETWORK

During a three-month investigation into a missing child, New Jersey detectives uncovered a child sex trafficking network. In October 2021, law enforcement officers discovered online advertisements offering the girl for prostitution. The New Jersey Attorney General's Office charged three adults for allegedly trafficking children for prostitution in the case.

New Jersey  
Child  
Trafficking  
Bust

## WISCONSIN CONSIDERS "LILY ALERT" FOR MISSING CHILDREN AFTER TRAGIC MURDER

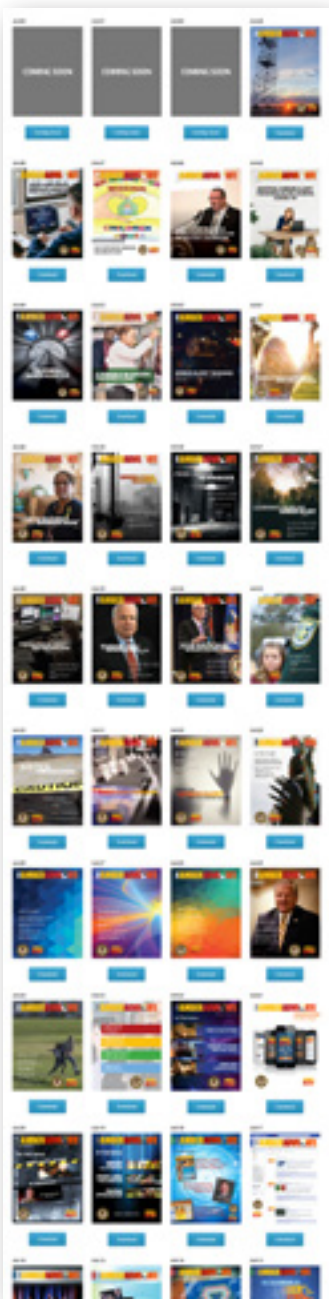
Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers said he is interested in creating a "Lily Alert" that could be used for a missing or abducted child – but with fewer criteria than an AMBER Alert. An online petition was started after 10-year-old Lily Peters was murdered by a 14-year-old boy. She was supposed to ride her bike home, and when she did not arrive, she was reported missing. An AMBER Alert was not issued because authorities didn't have descriptive information about the suspect or the suspect's vehicle. "I think we should look at that," Evans said. "Clearly it's not something that would cost a significant amount of money, and it seems a reasonable approach."

## PENNSYLVANIA LAWMAKERS CONSIDER HIT-AND-RUN ALERT

Pennsylvania legislators are considering creating an alert system to notify repair shops about hit-and-run drivers. The "Jay Alert" would be issued to all Pennsylvania auto body shops so workers could be on the lookout for vehicles involved in hit-and-runs resulting in serious injury or death. The bill is named after Jayanna Powell, an 8-year-old who was killed in 2016 by a hit-and-run driver.

## TEXAS AMBER ALERT PARTNERS HOST FIRST FUNDRAISING EVENT

The AMBER Alert Network of Brazos Valley in Texas held its first self-organized fundraiser in April 2022. The golf event in Bryan, Texas, raised funds to help with basic operational costs, as well as educational material, posters, and training courses for police on finding missing persons.



## A LOOK BACK AT 50 ISSUES OF THE AMBER ADVOCATE NEWSLETTER

Since 2006 the AMBER Advocate newsletter has covered the growth and expansion of the AMBER Alert program across the nation and internationally. Now on its 50th edition, we are more dedicated than ever to bringing you news about the people working hard to continuously strengthen AMBER Alert programs in every state through solid processes and protocols, comprehensive law enforcement training, public awareness and education, and expansion of partnerships to distribute lifesaving information when a child is abducted.

Over the last 15 years, The AMBER Advocate has covered a broad array of information. It has illustrated the evolution of the AMBER Alert network through the grass-roots work of state partnerships involving law enforcement, the media, the transportation sector, and other key stakeholders in public alerting. From the first AMBER Alert National Conference, the rise and use of social media, the beginning of Alerta AMBER Mexico and AMBER Alert in Europe, and so much more, we've witnessed together how AMBER Alerts are bringing endangered missing and abducted children home safely.

With more than 1,100 children recovered due to AMBER Alerts as of May 1, 2022, we know the programs around the globe work, and we stand in confidence that they will grow even stronger. Through AATTAP's work, we've been honored to help create a strong network of interstate and interagency cooperation between states, agencies, and the citizens they serve; breaking down barriers to communication and information sharing, and expanding and improving upon resources that expedite the safe recovery of abducted children.

We encourage you to go to [amberadvocate.org](https://amberadvocate.org) and take advantage of the resources available to all disciplines comprising the critical connectedness inherent in child protection: law enforcement and other criminal justice professions, child advocacy and social service providers, families and community members. While there, be sure to check out the [archive of past issues of The AMBER Advocate](#) and let us know which ones are your favorites.

## AATTAP TRAINING: LEARN MORE AND REGISTER

AATTAP always has a number of scheduled training events open for registration, and your agency can request training dates specifically for your area. [Click here](#) to see what's coming up and available to request. For participant reflections on their training experiences with AATTAP, visit [amberadvocate.org](https://amberadvocate.org).



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