# 2022 AMBER Alert Report

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children®

Analysis of AMBER Alert Activations in 2022

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# Introduction

The afternoon of January 13, 1996, Amber Hagerman, a 9-year-old girl who lived in Arlington, Texas, was last seen riding her bike in a parking lot. A witness saw a man with a black flat-bed truck snatch Amber from her bicycle. Four days later, Amber's body was found in a creek 3.2 miles from her grandparents' home. Her murder remains unsolved. Residents were outraged and began reaching out to broadcasters and law enforcement. One person, Diane Simone, suggested a program be implemented allowing use of the Emergency Alert System (EAS) to notify the public when a child has been abducted. If the community was aware, then residents could also assist in the search. Simone followed up with a letter, and her only request was the program be dedicated to the memory of Amber Hagerman. That letter was used by broadcasters who met with local law enforcement and created Amber's Plan in Amber Hagerman's memory.

As the initiative grew, it became known as America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response (AMBER) Plan, which provides a framework for law enforcement to rapidly broadcast information about child abductions to the public so the community can assist in the search for and safe recovery of the child. What began as a local effort in the Dallas-Fort Worth area has grown into a seamless nationwide initiative, with many other countries following suit. AMBER Alerts in the United States have continued to make use of every available technology. From the initial program launch in October of 1996 through December 2022, at least 1,133 children have been confirmed as safely recovered due to an AMBER Alert being issued.

AMBER Alerts rely on a voluntary partnership among law enforcement, broadcasters, private companies, state and federal agencies, nonprofit organizations, and technology partners to notify the public of an abduction. AMBER Alert plans initiate the alert by activating their state and local network, including resources such as the Emergency Alert System. Since 2005, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children® (NCMEC) has provided access to AMBER Alert Secondary Distribution (AASD), a resource composed of private corporations across many industries, social media, websites, digital signage, federal agencies, and others. Each of these partners bring unique technology to the program to enable the amplification of an alert to the public, staff, or customers. NCMEC provides geographically targeted information via the NCMEC Call Center to these partners as approved by each AMBER Alert coordinator. Finally, since 2012, both AMBER Alert plans and NCMEC can use Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) to provide geographically targeted cellular broadcasts to the public when a child is abducted.

On April 30, 2003, the *Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today (PROTECT) Act of 2003* (Pub. L. No. 108-21) was signed into law. Building on the steps already taken by the federal government to support AMBER Alerts, this act established the national coordination of state and local programs, including the development of guidance for issuance and dissemination of AMBER Alerts and the appointment of a national AMBER Alert coordinator within the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs. The national AMBER Alert coordinator, in collaboration with a national advisory group, developed a strategy for supporting states and communities to strengthen the AMBER Alert system nationwide and increase the likelihood abducted children will be recovered swiftly and safely.[1] And, in 2018, the *Ashlynne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act* (Pub. L. No. 115-166) expanded resources and focused on integrating tribal AMBER Alert systems with state and regional systems.

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[1]*National Strategy*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, www.amberalert.gov/ntl_strategy.htm, accessed March 16, 2023.

# AMBER Alert Program Information

The AMBER Alert program consists of independent AMBER Alert plans in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Navajo Nation, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. At the time of publication, and including local and regional AMBER Alert plans, there are 81 plans in the United States. Each of these plans coordinates with resources and law enforcement in their jurisdiction and uses specific criteria to determine if an abducted child case qualifies for an AMBER Alert.

While there may be slight variations, each plan generally follows the AMBER Alert criteria recommendations published by the Department of Justice. These criteria are:

- There is reasonable belief by law enforcement an abduction has occurred.
- The abduction is of a child age 17 or younger.
- The law enforcement agency believes the child is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death.
- There is enough descriptive information about the victim and abduction for law enforcement to issue an AMBER Alert to assist in the recovery of the child.
- The child's name and other critical data elements, including the Child Abduction flag, have been entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database.

AMBER Alerts may be activated by multiple plans for a single case and the AMBER Alert plans will coordinate with each other. Although an AMBER Alert can be issued in multiple states or territories, it is never issued on a nationwide basis. AMBER Alerts are geographically targeted based on law enforcement's investigation.

In order to augment the efforts of each of these plans, NCMEC provides operational support during AMBER Alerts via AMBER Alert Secondary Distribution; WEA activation, when requested; case management services and resources from NCMEC; and program analysis via this report.

The AMBER Alert program is also supported by many other partners representing federal agencies, law enforcement, broadcasters, private corporations, nonprofit organizations, and others with the goal of providing amplification of AMBER Alerts; training support; and other resources on the state, local, and national levels.

# 2022 AMBER Alert Overview

## Number and Locations of AMBER Alert Activations

### Summary of AMBER Alert Activations and Children Involved

From January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2022, 181 AMBER Alerts were issued in the U.S. involving 227 children.

Of the 181 AMBER Alerts issued in this time frame, 180 cases resulted in a recovery, 16 of which were successfully recovered as a direct result of an AMBER Alert being issued. As of March 10, 2023, when statistics for this report were finalized for the AMBER Alerts issued in 2022, one child remained actively missing and four children were located deceased.

Six cases were later determined to be hoaxes, and six cases were later determined to be unfounded.

For cases not determined to be hoaxes or unfounded, there were 98 family abductions (FA); 59 nonfamily abductions (NFA); seven endangered runaways (ERU); and five lost, injured, or otherwise missing (LIM) at the time of initial intake by NCMEC.

### Number of Alerts and Children
#### AMBER Alerts in 2022

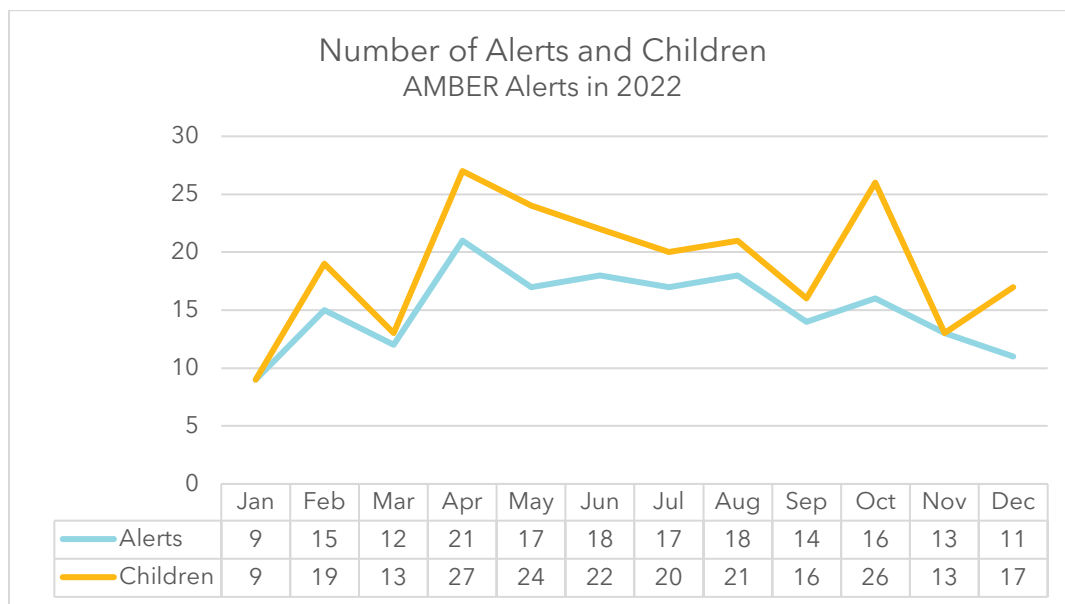| | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alerts | 9 | 15 | 12 | 21 | 17 | 18 | 17 | 18 | 14 | 16 | 13 | 11 |
| Children | 9 | 19 | 13 | 27 | 24 | 22 | 20 | 21 | 16 | 26 | 13 | 17 |

Figure 1: Number of AMBER Alert Activations and Children by Month

### AMBER Alerts by State/Territory

From January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2022, 181 AMBER Alerts originated in 42 states. Texas issued the most AMBER Alerts with 17 percent (n=31) followed by Georgia with eight percent (n=14) and Florida with seven percent (n=13).

Table 1: Number of Originating AMBER Alert Activations by State/Territory

| State/Territory | Number of alerts |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| Idaho, Illinois, South Dakota, and Virginia | 2 each |
| | |
| Navajo Nation, Nebraska, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, U.S. Virgin Islands, and Vermont | |
| **Total** | **181** |

## Multistate/Territory AMBER Alerts

When an AMBER Alert is issued, an abductor may take the child outside the jurisdiction of the issuing law enforcement authority. In some cases, the AMBER Alert coordinator in the state/territory where the AMBER Alert originated may request an AMBER Alert be extended into another state/territory. In 2022, four AMBER Alerts were extended beyond the limits of the state where the AMBER Alert first originated.

Table 2: List of Multistate/Territory AMBER Alerts

| Originating | Extending |
|---|---|
| California | Arizona |
| Louisiana | Mississippi |
| Missouri | Kansas |
| Virginia | Maryland |

## Range of AMBER Alerts

AMBER Alerts may be targeted to large or small areas as determined by law enforcement. Local alerts indicate a target area of one county; regional alerts indicate a target area of multiple counties, which may cross state lines and include regional AMBER Alert plan activations; statewide indicates the activation of an entire state; and multistate indicates more than one plan in different states activated for the same incident.
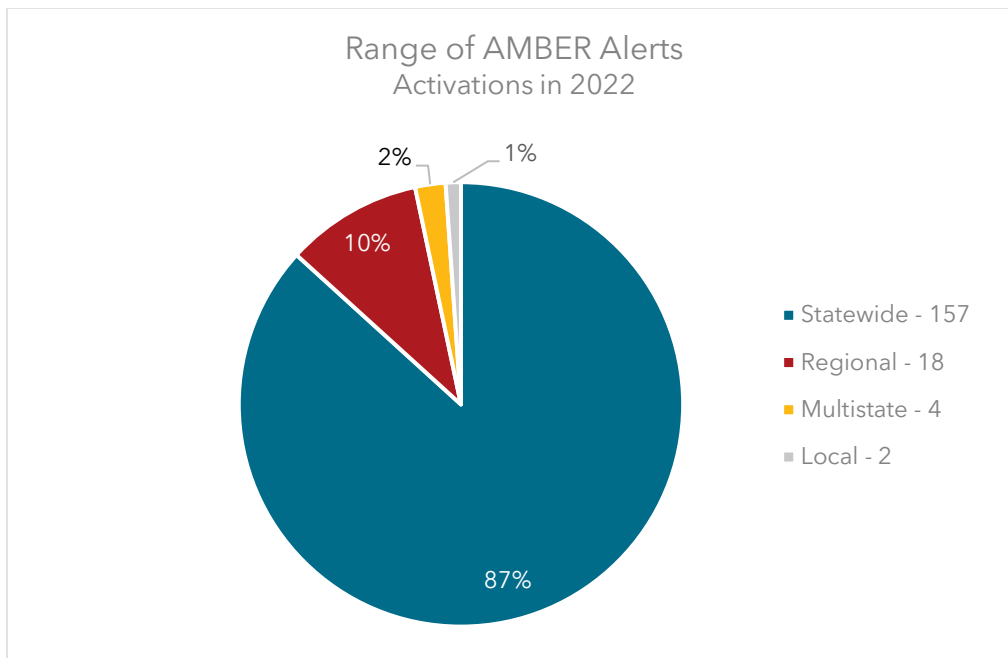
Figure 2: Range of AMBER Alerts

## NCMEC Operational Support for AMBER Alerts

NCMEC is tasked with providing support to AMBER Alert plans by the Department of Justice. This includes amplification of AMBER Alerts when they are activated, pre-planning with AMBER Alert plans, and post-alert data collection and reporting. NCMEC does not determine if an AMBER Alert should be activated, and all actions taken by NCMEC are with the permission of law enforcement.

### Secondary Distribution of AMBER Alerts

When an AMBER Alert is activated, NCMEC will deploy information to the AMBER Alert Secondary Distribution (AASD) network with the permission of the AMBER Alert coordinator. The AASD network amplifies the AMBER Alert using ever-evolving technology. The NCMEC Call Center works closely with each AMBER Alert coordinator to activate this system. As part of this procedure, NCMEC also posts the active alert on the national social media accounts for AMBER Alerts and on https://www.missingkids.org/gethelpnow/amber so the public can easily access the full alert.

AMBER Alert secondary distribution was completed for 171 AMBER alerts involving 216 children. In some instances, the alert may be canceled before secondary dissemination of the AMBER Alert is completed.

### Wireless Emergency Alerts

Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) can be activated by agencies connected to or designated by an AMBER Alert plan, which could include emergency management agencies, law enforcement, or directly by the AMBER Alert coordinator. NCMEC has the ability to activate WEA messages at the request of an AMBER Alert coordinator for any geographic area within the United States and can also provide a backup in instances of system failures. NCMEC works with each plan to determine the appropriate level of support, and the NCMEC Call Center activates WEA when requested during an AMBER Alert activation.

WEA messages are used for many types of emergency notifications. Cellphone users will see either a 90- or 360-character message displayed on their phone with an alert tone. WEA messages may not be issued for

every case. The use of this tool is determined by law enforcement and the AMBER Alert coordinator, who must consider the available information to share with the public, investigative needs, timing, and geography. In some instances, the child is recovered quickly before the WEA message can be sent. In other instances, multiple WEA messages may be activated for a single AMBER Alert case, due to the geography or updated details of an AMBER Alert.

From December 2012 through December 2022, 1,636 WEA messages have been issued for AMBER Alerts. NCMEC activated 1,216 of those and 420 were activated by other agencies. In 2022, WEA was activated 178 times for AMBER Alerts with 104 sent by NCMEC and 74 sent by other agencies.

## Team Adam Consultant Deployment

Team Adam is a program of NCMEC providing an on-site response and technical assistance support system to local law enforcement and support for families of missing and sexually exploited children. Team Adam was named in memory of 6-year-old Adam Walsh, the abducted and murdered son of NCMEC co-founders John and Revé Walsh.

In 2022, Team Adam consultants were deployed to assist with 10 AMBER Alert cases involving 12 children. One case was later determined to be unfounded. Eleven children actually determined to be missing were recovered.

# Primary Case Analysis

The following analysis provides details about AMBER Alerts and the abduction events which led to the activation of an alert. In some cases, it is determined upon resolution that the case did not meet AMBER Alert criteria due to inaccurate or intentionally false information provided to law enforcement. Cases falling under this designation are not included in this section and are analyzed separately in the *Hoax and Unfounded AMBER Alerts* section.

This section discusses 169 AMBER Alerts involving 211 children.

## AMBER Alert Cases and Children

### *AMBER Alert by Case Type at Intake*

A case type is assigned by NCMEC when an AMBER Alert is received, and an intake is completed by the NCMEC Call Center. As the investigation progresses, or recovery information is received, it may be determined the original case type must be changed. This section reflects case information available at the time of the initial AMBER Alert activation.
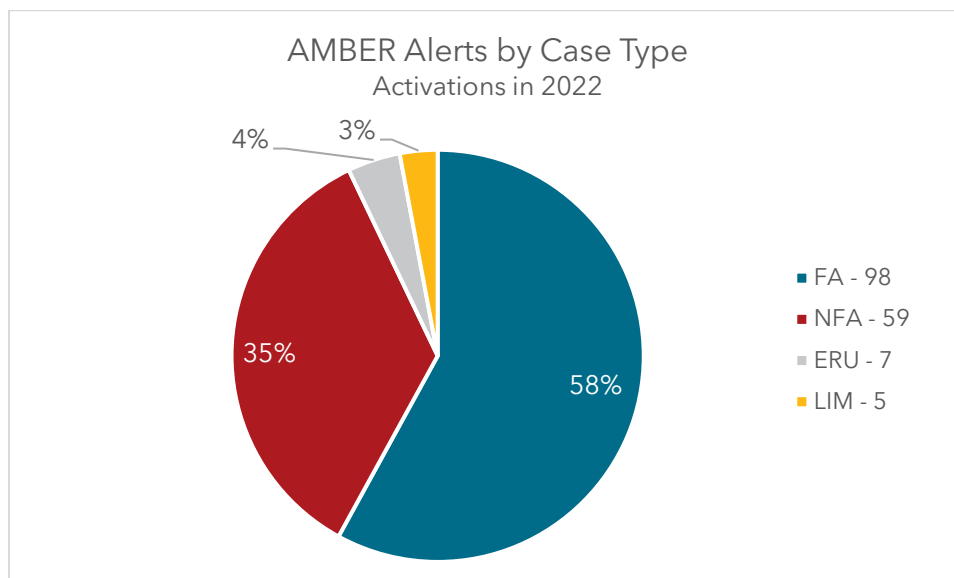


Figure 3: AMBER Alerts by Case Type at Intake

### *Demographics of Children Reported Missing*

Females (n=126) were involved in AMBER Alert activations more often at 60 percent, compared to males who represented 40 percent (n=85). Children younger than five represented 46 percent (n=98) of the children who were reported missing with known ages.
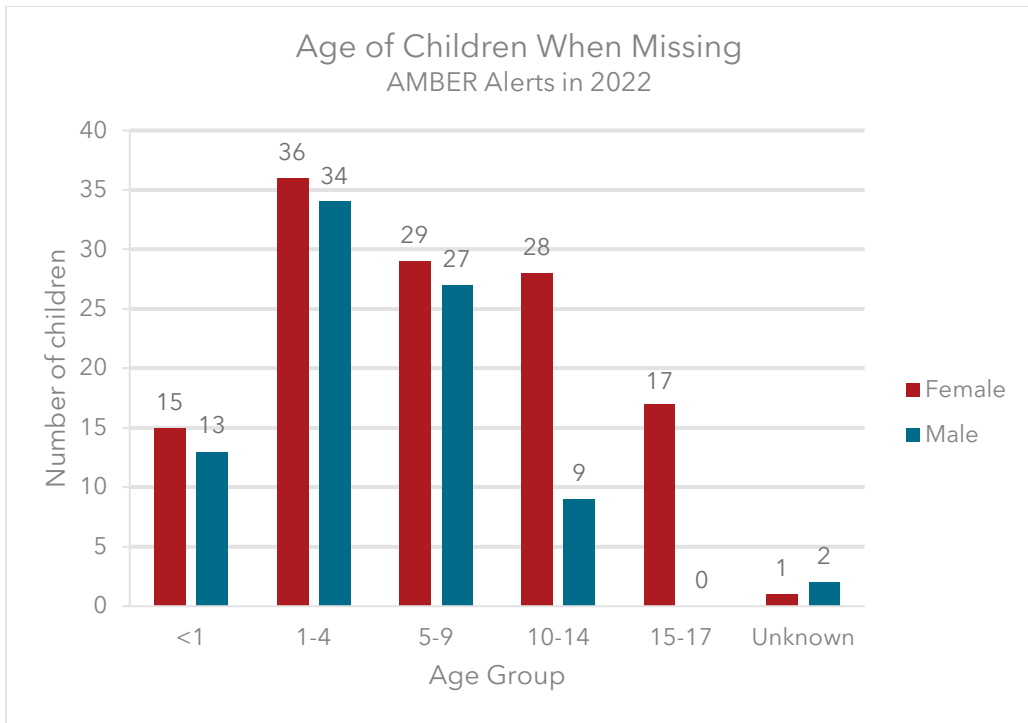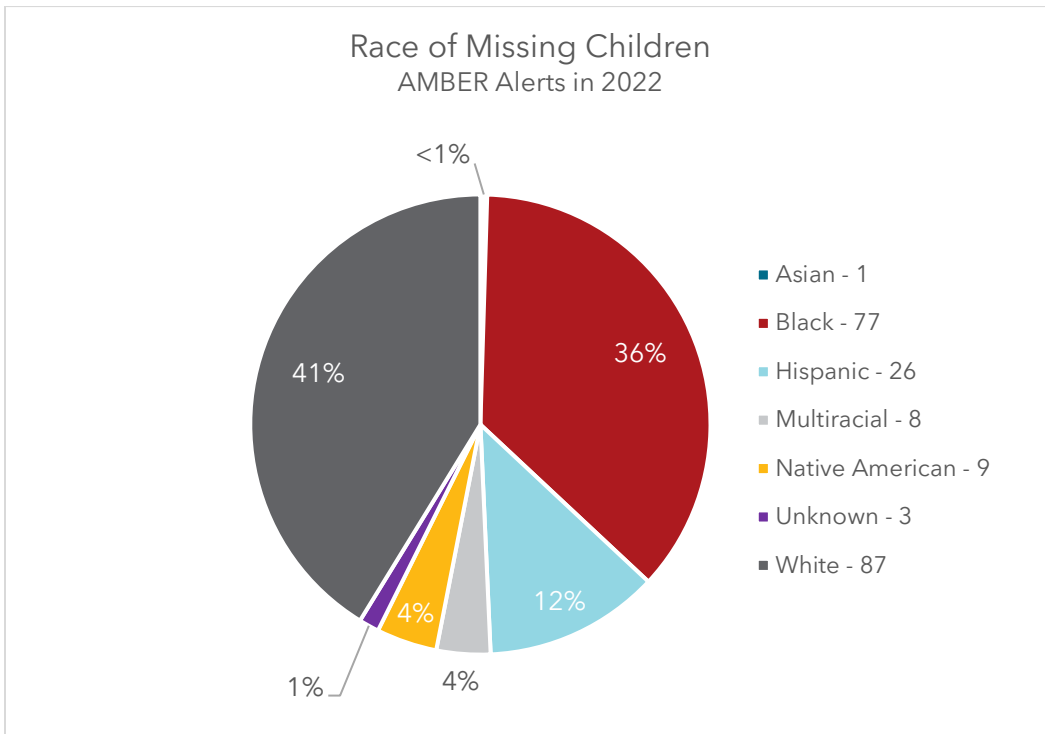
Figure 4: Age of Children When Missing



Figure 5: Race of Missing Children in AMBER Alerts

# Abductors in AMBER Alert Cases

## Abductor Demographics

In 2022, 180 abductors were identified as being involved in 151 AMBER Alert cases.

The majority of abductors were male at 61 percent (n=110), and 34 percent (n=62) of abductors were female. The sex for four percent (n=8) of abductors was unknown.

Thirty-three percent (n=60) of abductors were Black, 31 percent (n=56) of abductors were White, 13 percent (n=24) of abductors were Hispanic, two percent (n=4) of abductors were Native American, two percent (n=3) of abductors were Multiracial, and one percent (n=1) of abductors were Asian/Pacific Islander. The race for 18 percent (n=32) of abductors was unknown.

## Abductor Relationship to Child

An AMBER Alert case may involve multiple abductors; therefore, the number of abductors may exceed the number of cases for any case type. Multiple abductors involved in an AMBER Alert case may have different relationships to the abducted child. For example, a mother who abducts her child may use her boyfriend as an accomplice. Therefore, he may also be listed as an abductor.

Table 3: Abductor Relationship to Child by Case Type at Intake

| Abductor relationship to child | FA | NFA | LIM | ERU | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aunt | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Boyfriend | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Brother | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Ex-boyfriend | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Father | 50 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 51 |
| Father's girlfriend | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Friend of family | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Grandmother | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Mother | 31 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 35 |
| Mother's boyfriend | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| No relation | 2 | 21 | 2 | 0 | 25 |
| Other | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| Sister | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Stepbrother | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Stepfather | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Uncle | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Unknown | 11 | 24 | 0 | 2 | 37 |
| **Total** | **109** | **66** | **3** | **2** | **180** |

## Presumed or Likely Motivation for Abduction

In some AMBER Alert cases, a motivation may be confirmed or considered likely based on the circumstances of the case. When this is possible, the abductor's motive is determined by the primary abductor in the case rather than each abductor in the case. This is not a legal determination of intent, nor

does it necessarily reflect the legal resolution of a case. It is intended to identify possible trends in abductions which trigger the activation of AMBER Alerts.

Table 4: Abductor's Motive for Abduction by Case

| Motivation for abduction | Number of alerts |
|---|---|
| Domestic (Custodial) | 70 |
| Unknown | 29 |
| Domestic (Other) | 17 |
| Criminal activity | 14 |
| Vehicle theft | 11 |
| Sexual (No enticement) | 9 |
| Enticement (Online) | 6 |
| Undisclosed | 5 |
| Mental health concerns | 4 |
| Infant abduction | 1 |
| Ransom | 1 |
| Substance use | 1 |
| Child Sex Trafficking (CST) | 1 |
| **Total** | **169** |

Table 5: Abductor's Motive for Abduction by Abductor Relationship to Child

| Motivation for | | Other | Known to | No | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Domestic (Custodial) | 62 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 11 | 84 |
| Unknown | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 20 |
| Domestic (Other) | 11 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 17 |
| Criminal activity | 7 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 16 |
| Sexual (No enticement) | 1 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 13 |
| Vehicle theft | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 4 | 11 |
| Undisclosed | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 6 |
| Enticement (Online) | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 5 |
| Mental health concerns | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 4 |
| Substance use | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Child Sex Trafficking | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Ransom | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| **Total** | **86** | **13** | **19** | **25** | **37** | **180** |

# AMBER Alert Incident Duration

## Time Between Reported Missing and Activation

Information about the time between when the child was reported missing to law enforcement and the AMBER Alert's activation was available in 154 cases.
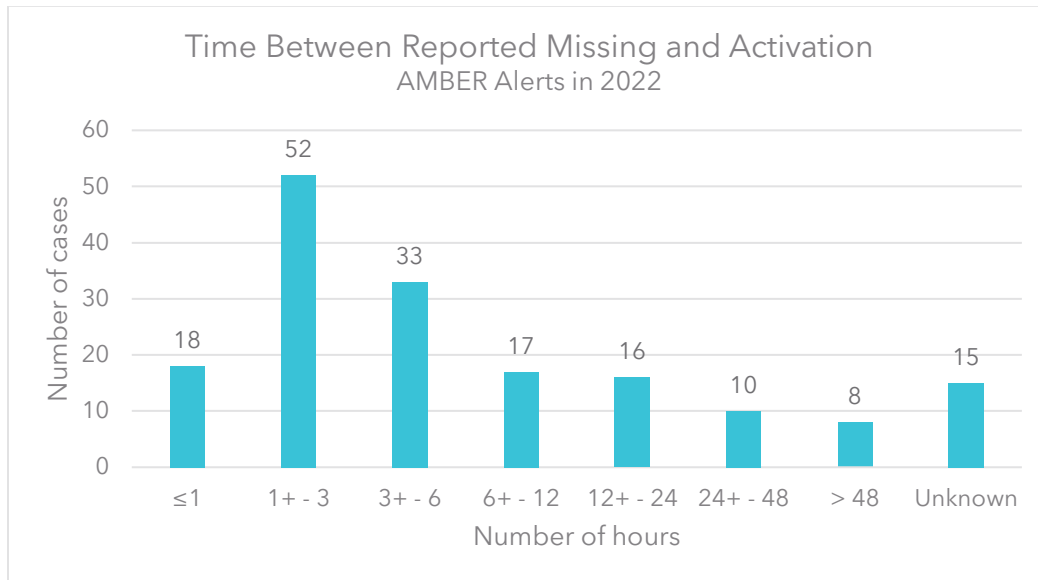
**Time Between Reported Missing and Activation**
AMBER Alerts in 2022

| ≤1 | 1+ - 3 | 3+ - 6 | 6+ - 12 | 12+ - 24 | 24+ - 48 | > 48 | Unknown |
|----|--------|--------|---------|----------|----------|------|---------|
| 18 | 52 | 33 | 17 | 16 | 10 | 8 | 15 |

Number of cases (y-axis), Number of hours (x-axis)

Figure 6: Time Between Reported Missing and Activation

## Time Between Reported Missing and Recovery

Information about the time between when the child was reported missing to law enforcement and the AMBER Alert recovery was available in 154 cases. One case remains active.
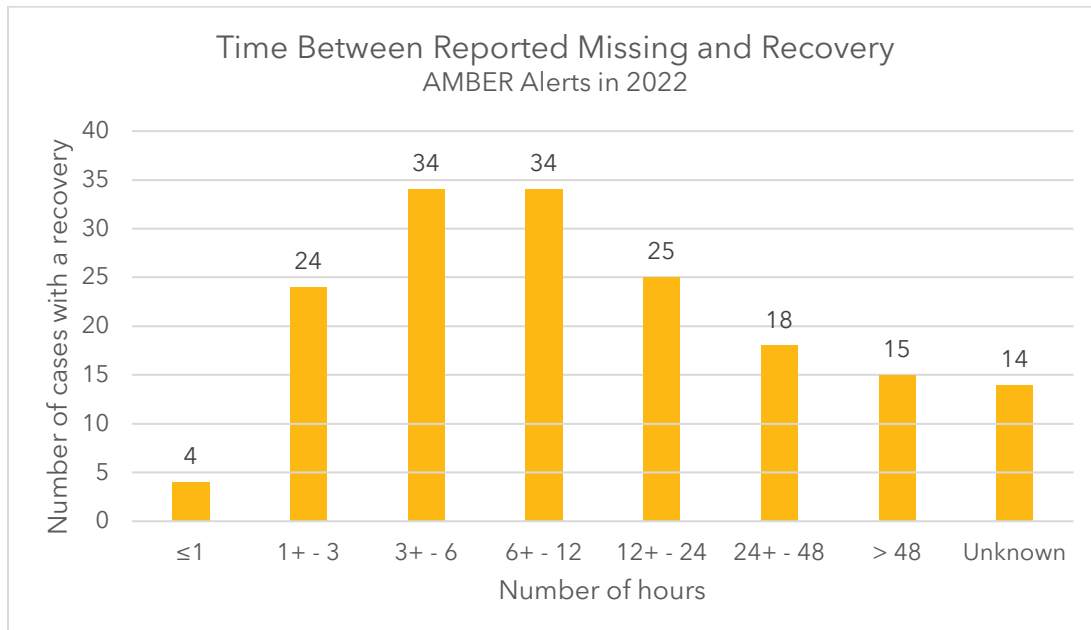
**Time Between Reported Missing and Recovery**
AMBER Alerts in 2022

| ≤1 | 1+ - 3 | 3+ - 6 | 6+ - 12 | 12+ - 24 | 24+ - 48 | > 48 | Unknown |
|----|--------|--------|---------|----------|----------|------|---------|
| 4 | 24 | 34 | 34 | 25 | 18 | 15 | 14 |

Number of cases with a recovery (y-axis), Number of hours (x-axis)

Figure 7: Time Between Reported Missing and Recovery

## Time Between Activation and Recovery

Information about the time between when the AMBER Alert was activated, and the AMBER Alert recovery was available in 168 cases. One case remains active.
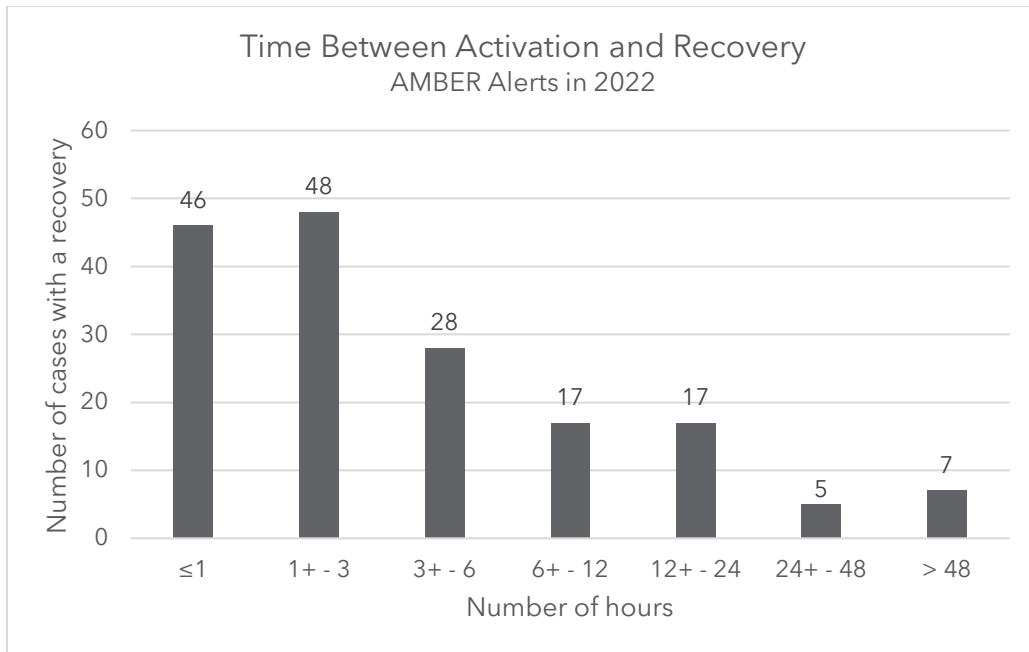


Figure 8: Time Between Activation and Recovery

## Recovery Within Three Days of Activation

Information about the date between when the AMBER Alert was activated, and the AMBER Alert recovery was available in all 180 cases. One case remains active. Table 6 includes data for hoax and unfounded AMBER Alerts.

Table 6: Recovery Within Three Days of Activation

| Time between activation and recovery 1/1/2022   12/31/2022 | |
|---|---|
| Case Intake | 181 |
| Cases reclassified as hoax or unfounded after intake | 12 |
| Children Intake | 227 |
| Children whose cases were reclassified as hoax or unfounded after intake | 16 |
| Number of cases in which child recovered within 72 hours | 164 |
| Percent of cases in which child recovered within 72 hours | 97 percent* |
| Number of children reported as being recovered within 72 hours | 204 |
| Percent of children reported as being recovered within 72 hours | 97 percent** |

*Percentage excludes cases reclassified as hoaxes (n=6) and unfounded (n=6)
**Percentage excludes children whose cases were reclassified as hoaxes (n=7) and unfounded (n=9)

# Case Geography

## *Missing Location*

In 2022, there were 148 cases with information about where the children involved were last known to be located.

Table 7: Missing Location

| Missing location | Number of cases | Percent |
|---|:---:|:---:|
| Child's residence | 84 | 50% |
| Unknown | 21 | 12% |
| Automobile | 17 | 10% |
| School facility | 10 | 6% |
| Street | 6 | 4% |
| Retail | 6 | 4% |
| Other | 6 | 4% |
| Other residence | 6 | 4% |
| Restaurant | 4 | 2% |
| Medical facility | 3 | 2% |
| Social services | 2 | 1% |
| School bus stop | 1 | <1% |
| Homeless shelter | 1 | <1% |
| Outdoor/open area | 1 | <1% |
| Park | 1 | <1% |
| **Total** | **169** | **100%** |

## *Travel Distances*

In 2022, distances between where the child was reported missing and recovered were known for 155 AMBER Alert cases. One case remains active.
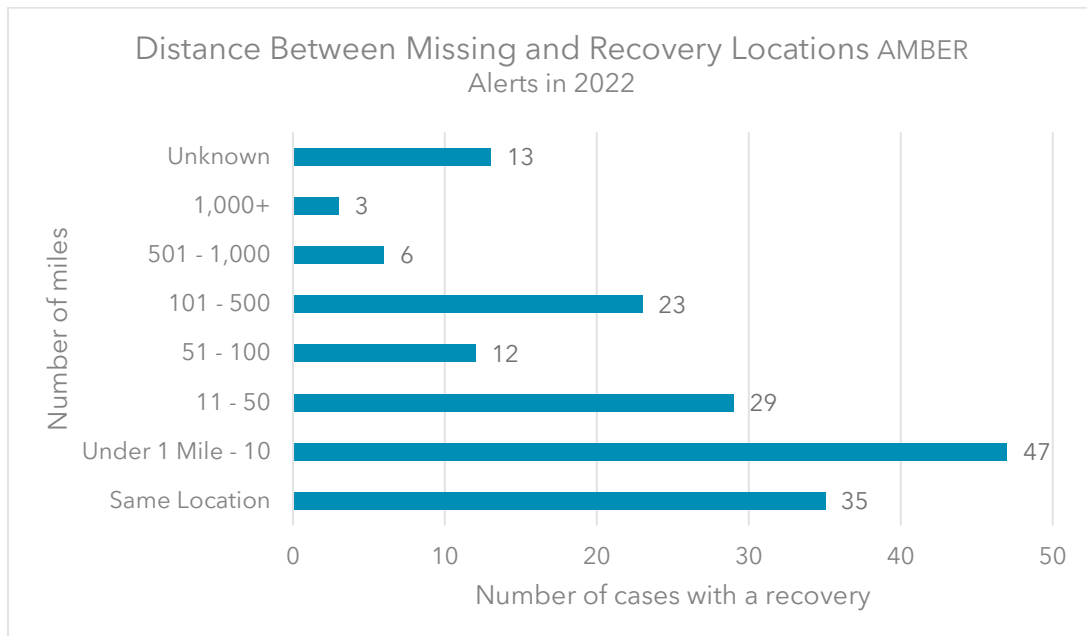


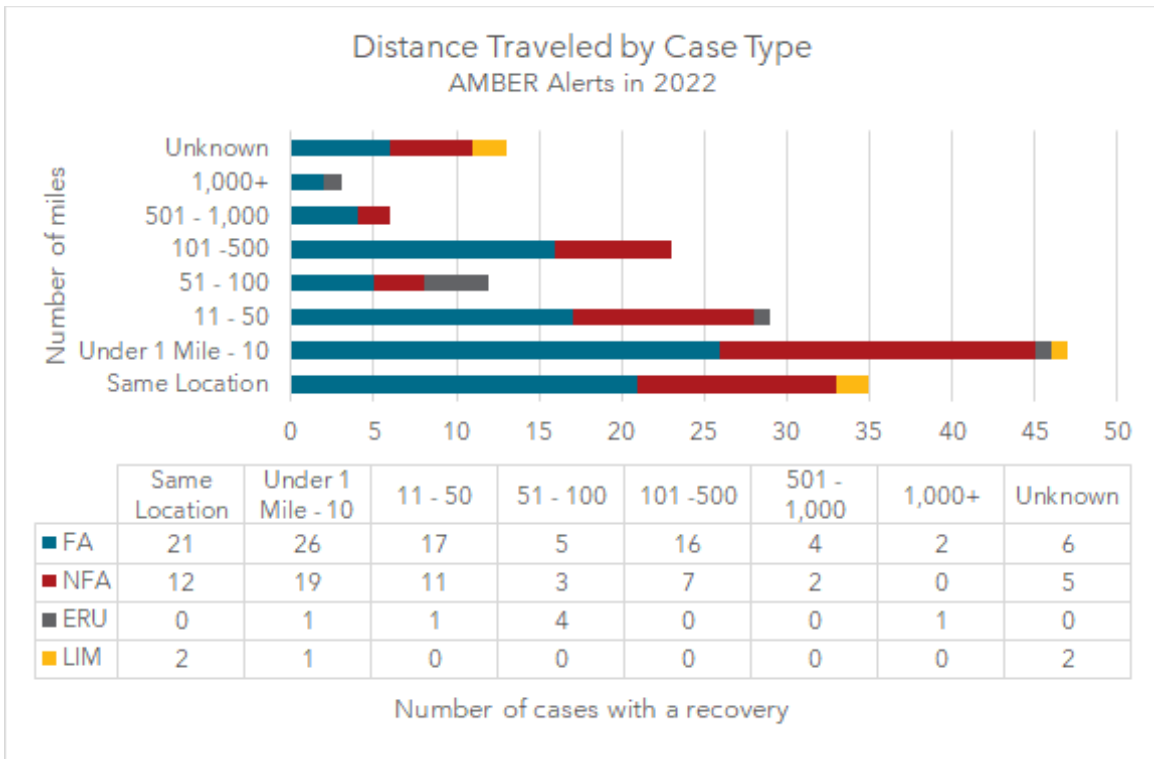Figure 9: Distance Between Missing and Recovery Locations

## Distance Traveled by Case Type
### AMBER Alerts in 2022

| | Same Location | Under 1 Mile - 10 | 11 - 50 | 51 - 100 | 101 -500 | 501 - 1,000 | 1,000+ | Unknown |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FA | 21 | 26 | 17 | 5 | 16 | 4 | 2 | 6 |
| NFA | 12 | 19 | 11 | 3 | 7 | 2 | 0 | 5 |
| ERU | 0 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| LIM | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

Number of cases with a recovery

Figure 10: Distance Traveled by Case Type at Intake

### *International Abductions*

In 2022, there were three AMBER Alert activations as a result of an international abduction. One child was abducted by her father and recovered in Mexico. Two children in one AMBER Alert were abducted from Canada by their mother and her companion and were recovered in South Dakota. Another child was abducted by his father and grandmother and was recovered in Canada.

### *Recoveries Outside of State/Territory Where AMBER Alert First Activated*

There are instances when an abductor may travel with a child out of the state/territory where the AMBER Alert was first activated. Of the 181 AMBER Alerts issued in 2022, one case remains active.
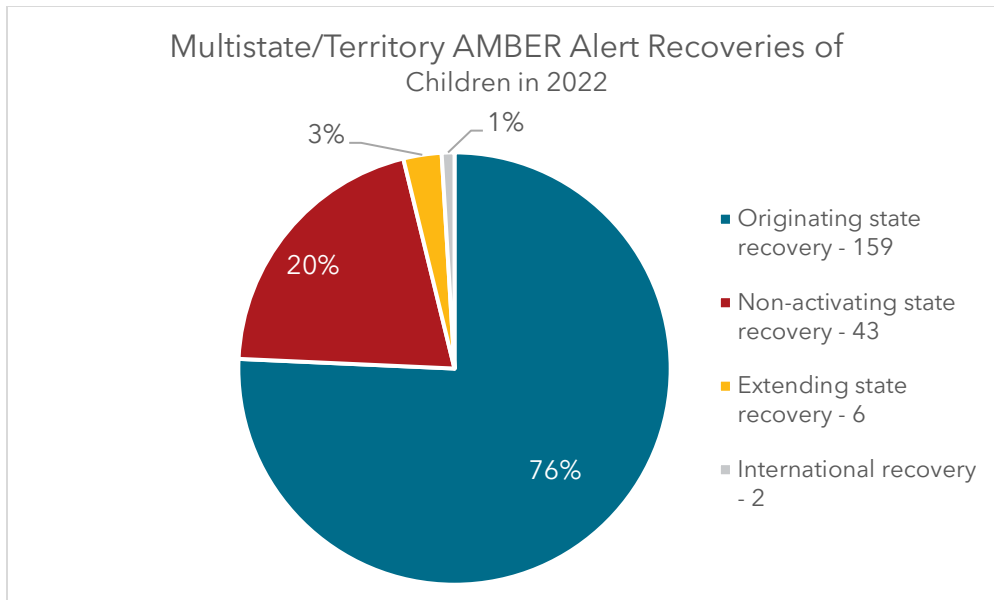
Figure 11: Multistate/Territory AMBER Alert Recoveries

## Recovery Location

There were 138 cases with information about where the child was recovered. One case remains active. In 2022, 25 percent (n=43) of children involved in AMBER Alert cases were most often recovered at another residence followed by recoveries in an automobile at 18 percent (n=30).

Table 8: Recovery Location

| Recovery location | Number of cases | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Other residence | 43 | 25% |
| Unknown | 30 | 18% |
| Automobile | 30 | 18% |
| Law enforcement station | 13 | 8% |
| Retail | 9 | 5% |
| Hotel/motel | 8 | 5% |
| Outdoor/open area | 7 | 4% |
| Child's residence | 6 | 4% |
| Medical facility | 4 | 2% |
| Restaurant | 4 | 2% |
| Transportation facility | 3 | 2% |
| Street | 3 | 2% |
| Other | 2 | 1% |
| Parking lot/garage | 2 | 1% |
| Social services | 2 | 1% |
| Office building | 1 | <1% |
| Park | 1 | <1% |
| **Total** | **168** | **100%** |

# Vehicle Information in AMBER Alert Broadcast

AMBER Alert cases often involve a vehicle, though vehicle information is not required to issue an AMBER Alert. When appropriate, law enforcement will include this information in the notification sent to the public. In some instances, only vehicle descriptors, such as make, model, or color, are available. In others, complete or partial license plate information is available.
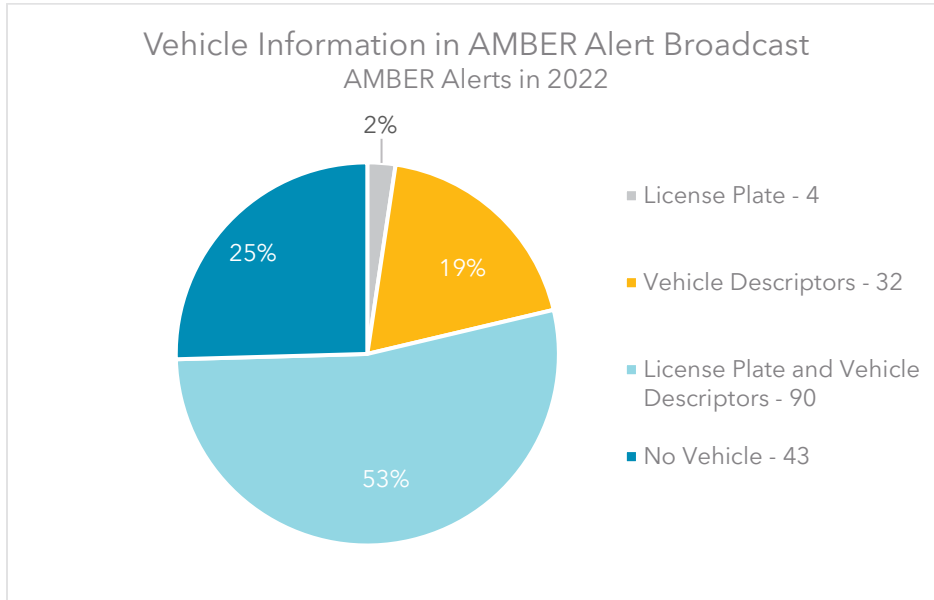


Figure 12: Vehicle Information Listed in AMBER Alert Broadcast

# Success Stories

A success story is a case in which a child is confirmed to have been safely recovered as a direct result of the AMBER Alert being issued. A case is not considered a successful recovery if the law enforcement investigation indicates the case is unfounded or a hoax.

## Count of Success Stories

Of the 181 AMBER Alert cases in 2022, 22 children involved in 16 AMBER Alert cases were successfully recovered as a direct result of those respective AMBER Alerts being issued.

Table 9: Success Stories by Case Type

| Case type at intake | Number of successful recoveries by case | Number of successful recoveries by child |
|---|---|---|
| FA | 10 | 16 |
| NFA | 5 | 5 |
| ERU | 1 | 1 |
| LIM | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | **16** | **22** |

## Reason for Success Stories

The most common reason for an AMBER Alert success story is an individual or law enforcement recognizing the child and/or abductor from the AMBER Alert at 44 percent (n=7).

Table 10: Reason for Success Stories

| Reason for success story | Number of cases | Number of children |
|---|---|---|
| Individual or law enforcement recognized child and/or abductor | 7 | 7 |
| Abductor heard alert and released child | 4 | 5 |
| Individual or law enforcement recognized vehicle | 4 | 9 |
| Individual heard alert and convinced abductor to turn self in | 1 | 1 |
| **Total** | **16** | **22** |

## Time Between Activation and Recovery for Success Stories

Of the success stories in 2022, 73 percent of the children (n=16) were successfully recovered within three hours of those AMBER Alerts being issued.
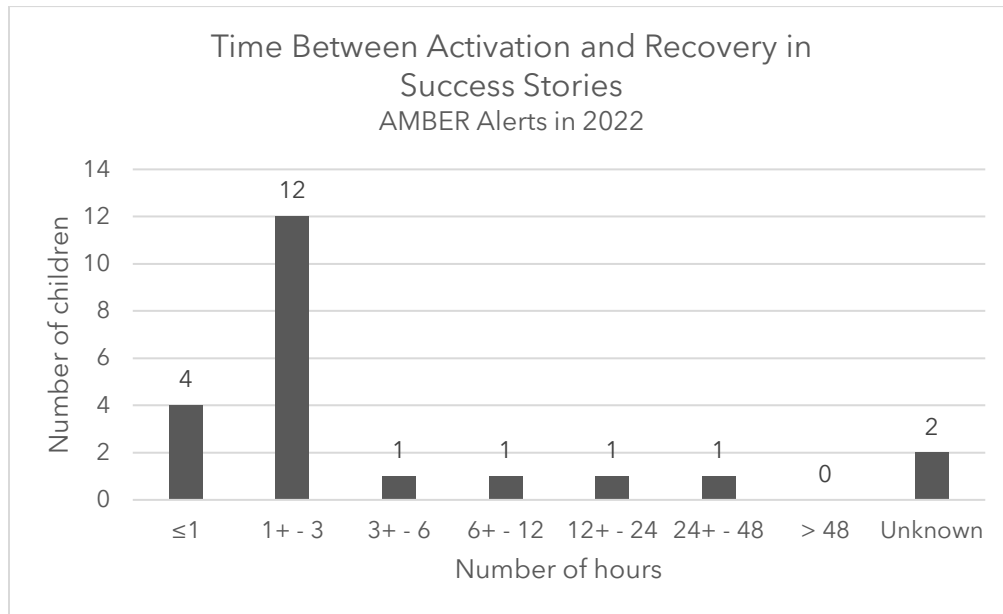


Figure 13: Time Between Activation and Recovery for Success Stories

# Children Located Deceased

In 2022, four children in four separate AMBER Alert cases were located deceased. Children in hoax and unfounded AMBER Alerts have been included in this analysis.

Table 11: Children Located Deceased

| Case Type | Abductor Motivation | Race/Sex of child | Age when missing | Time between activation and resolution | Distance (miles) between missing and recovery | Manner of death |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FA | Domestic (Other) | Black female | 1 | <72 hours | 11 - 50 | Homicide |
| FA | Domestic (Other) | Multiracial female | 15 | <72 hours | 11 - 50 | Homicide |
| FA | Unknown | Hispanic female | 1 | <72 hours | Under 1 -10 | Homicide |
| LIM | Sexual (No enticement) | White female | 7 | <72 hours | Unknown | Undisclosed* |

*Undisclosed means the manner of death was not released by the investigative agency at the time of data collection.

# Hoax and Unfounded AMBER Alerts

## Hoax AMBER Alerts

### *Cases and Children in Hoax AMBER Alerts*

In 2022, three percent (n=6) of AMBER Alerts issued involving seven children were later determined to be hoaxes.
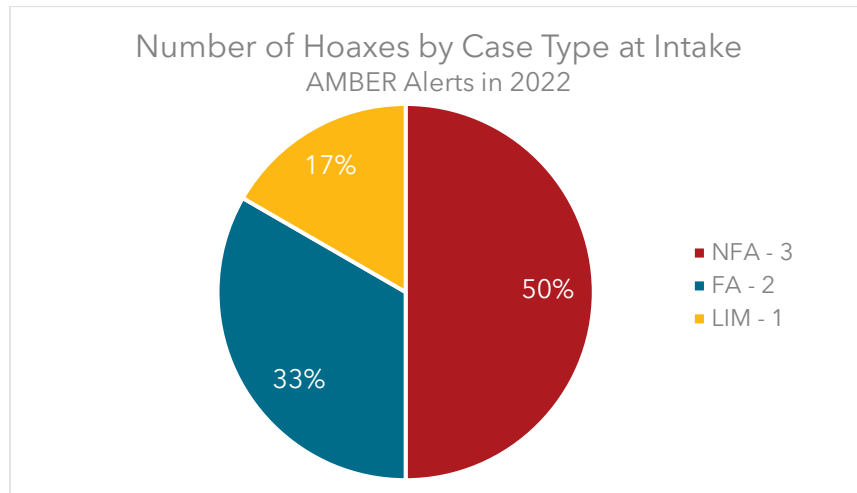


Figure 14: Number of Hoaxes by Case Type at Intake

Table 12: Age and Sex of Children in Hoaxes

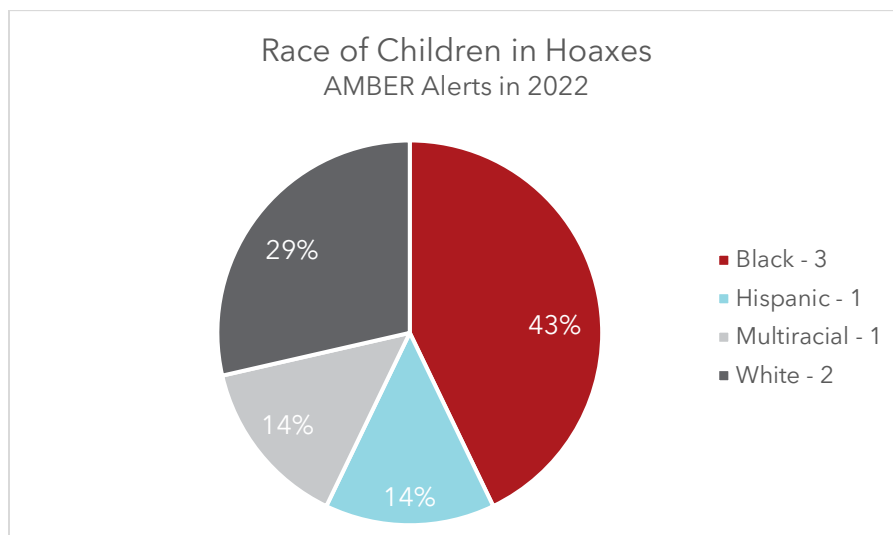| Age Group | Female | Male | Total |
|-----------|--------|------|-------|
| <1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 1-4 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5-9 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 15-17 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| **Total** | **2** | **5** | **7** |



Figure 15: Race of Children in Hoaxes

## Hoax Source or Reporting Party

In 67 percent (n=4) of hoaxes, false information was provided by the child's parent and 17 percent (n=1) of false information was provided by the child. For one case, it was unknown who provided false information.

## Reported Hoax Locations

Of the six cases determined to be hoaxes, all cases had known locations from which the children involved were reported missing. Of those cases, 83 percent (n=5) were reported missing from the child's residence and 17 percent (n=1) were reported missing from an automobile.

## Unfounded AMBER Alerts

In 2022, three percent (n=6) of AMBER Alerts issued involving nine children were later determined to be unfounded.
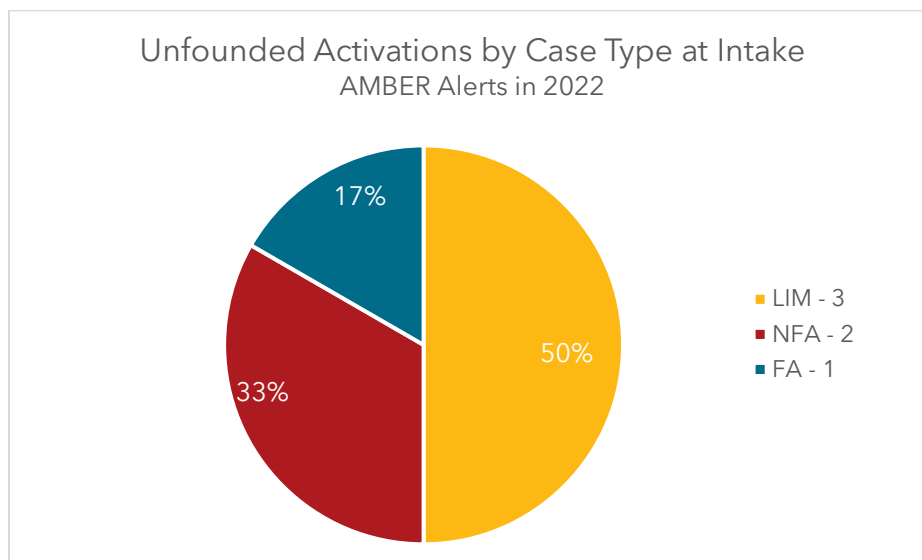


Figure 16: Unfounded Activations by Case Type at Intake

Table 13: Age and Sex of Children in Unfounded AMBER Alerts

| Age group | Female | Male | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| <1 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 1-4 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| 5-9 | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| 15-17 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| **Total** | **4** | **5** | **9** |

**Race of Children in Unfounded Activations**
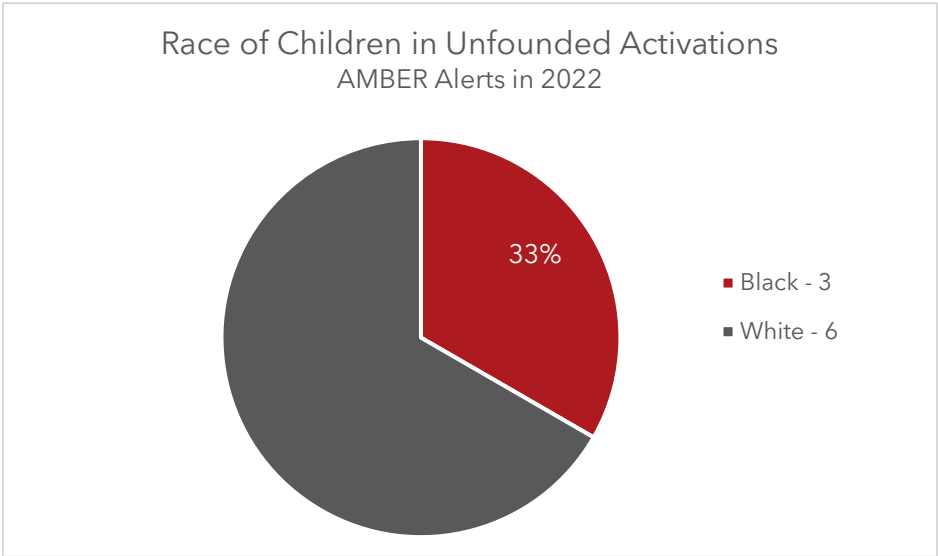AMBER Alerts in 2022

33%

- Black - 3
- White - 6

Figure 17: Race of Children in Unfounded AMBER Alerts

# Five-Year Comparison of AMBER Alerts Issued

This section includes all hoax and unfounded AMBER Alerts for the described parameters and time periods.

## Five-Year Overview
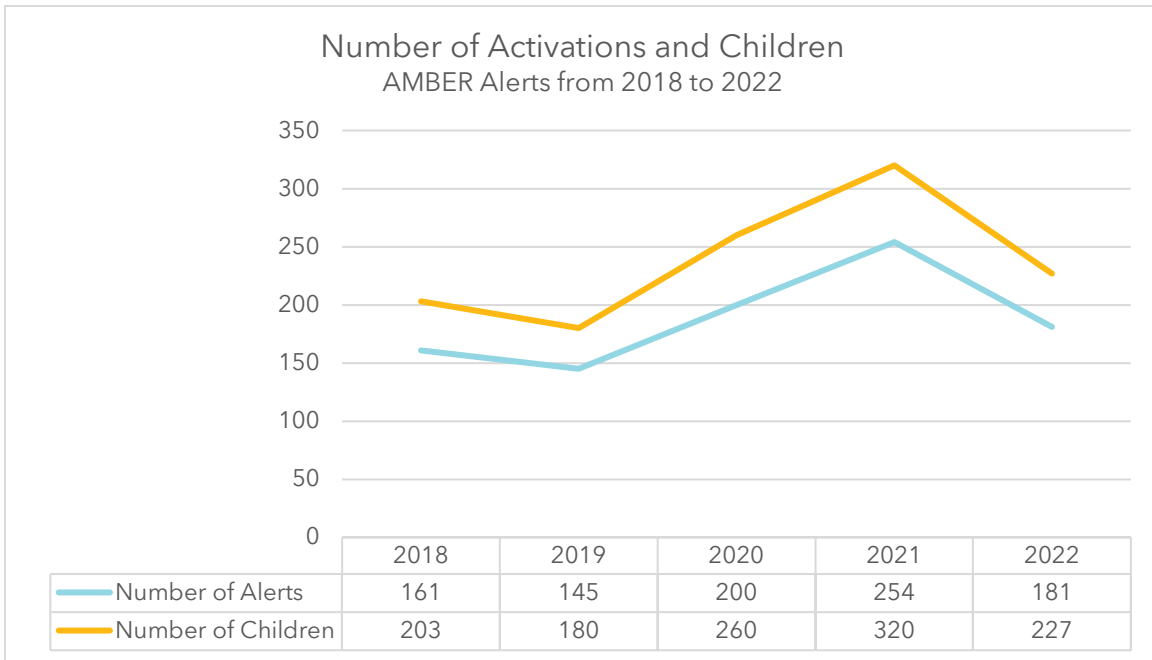
*Yearly Totals of AMBER Alerts and Children Involved*

### Number of Activations and Children
AMBER Alerts from 2018 to 2022

|  | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of Alerts | 161 | 145 | 200 | 254 | 181 |
| Number of Children | 203 | 180 | 260 | 320 | 227 |

Figure 18: Number of AMBER Alerts and Children from 2018 to 2022

*Monthly AMBER Alert Totals*

Table 14: Number of AMBER Alerts by Month from 2018 to 2022

|  | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2018 | 12 | 3 | 15 | 14 | 22 | 17 | 18 | 13 | 18 | 7 | 14 | 8 |
| 2019 | 10 | 5 | 12 | 10 | 18 | 9 | 10 | 18 | 11 | 16 | 12 | 14 |
| 2020 | 13 | 15 | 13 | 19 | 18 | 24 | 16 | 13 | 16 | 22 | 18 | 13 |
| 2021 | 23 | 23 | 28 | 15 | 21 | 27 | 19 | 19 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 19 |
| 2022 | 9 | 15 | 12 | 21 | 17 | 18 | 17 | 18 | 14 | 16 | 13 | 11 |
| **Average Total** | **13** | **12** | **16** | **16** | **19** | **19** | **16** | **16** | **16** | **16** | **16** | **13** |

# Children in AMBER Alerts from 2018 to 2022

## Reported Race of Children

Figure 19 provides the total number of children by race as reported to law enforcement at the initiation of an AMBER Alert. It includes children shown in AMBER Alerts later determined to be hoaxes or unfounded. Earlier portions of this report provide more detailed break downs of race in hoax or unfounded alerts vs. non-hoax/unfounded alerts.



### Reported Race of Children
AMBER Alerts from 2018 to 2022

| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020* | 2021* | 2022* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| White | 66 | 58 | 84 | 125 | 95 |
| Black | 73 | 69 | 90 | 116 | 83 |
| Hispanic | 39 | 33 | 58 | 36 | 27 |
| Native American | 2 | 10 | 11 | 22 | 9 |
| Multiracial | 17 | 8 | 15 | 15 | 9 |
| Asian | 6 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| Pacific Islander | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
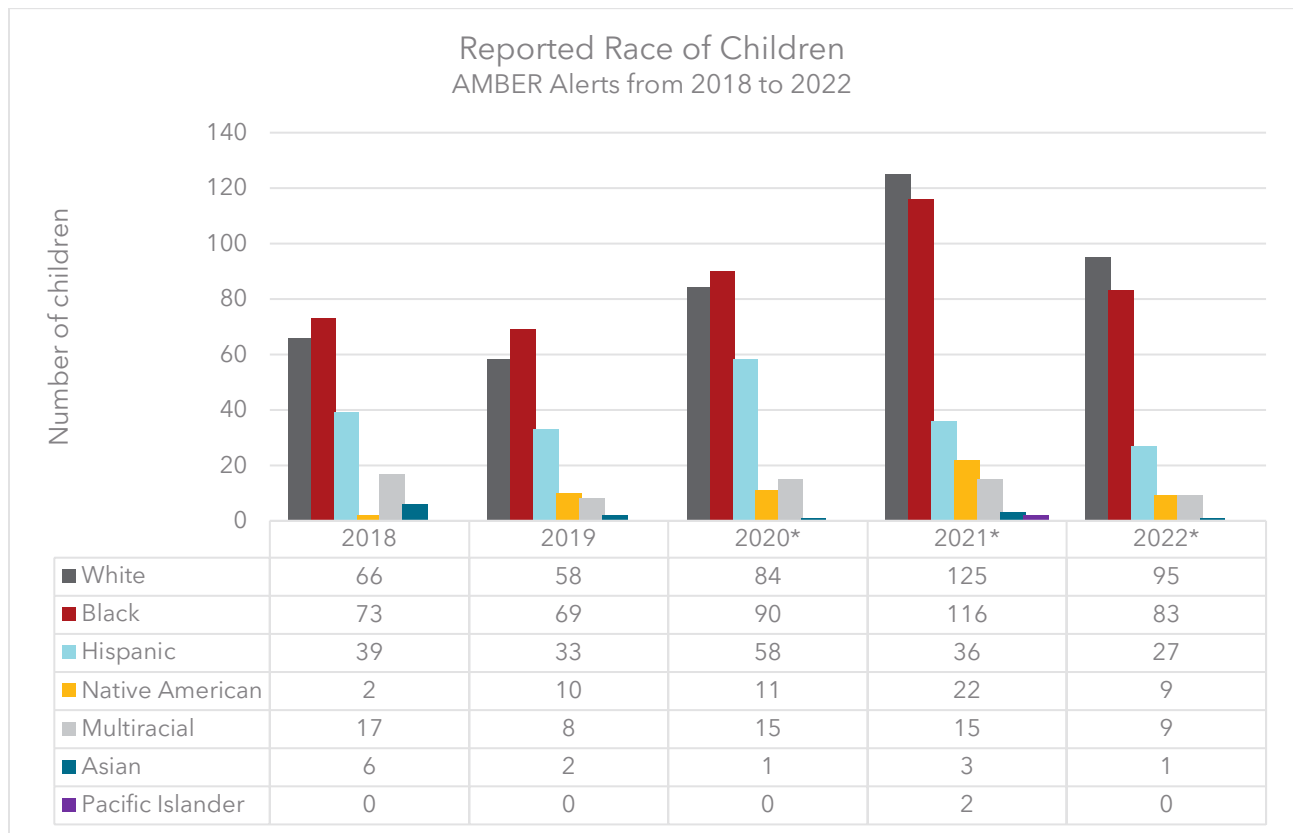
*The race of some children was unknown

Figure 19: Reported Race of Children from 2018 to 2022

## Deceased Children

Table 15: Number of Children Located Deceased from 2018 to 2022

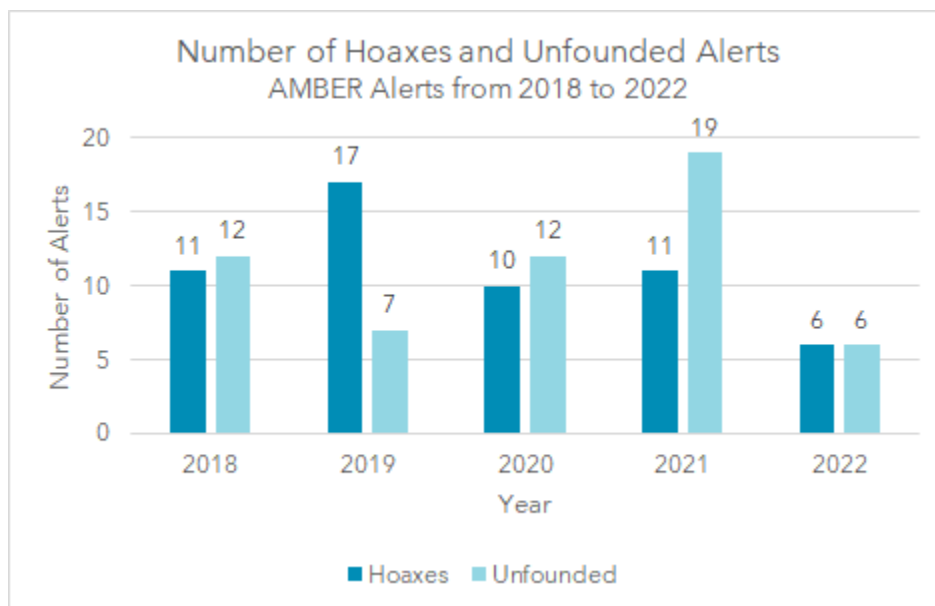| Case type at intake | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FA | 1 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 9 |
| NFA | 5 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 11 |
| LIM | 1 | 4 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 13 |
| ERU | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| **Total** | **7** | **10** | **10** | **2** | **4** | **33** |

# Hoaxes and Unfounded AMBER Alerts



Figure 20: Number of Hoaxes and Unfounded Alerts from 2018 to 2022

# Glossary

**AMBER Alert:** An AMBER Alert is a rapid notification to the public using all available technology when a child is abducted or believed to have been abducted. AMBER Alerts are activated based on specific criteria and use common technologies across each AMBER Alert plan. For the purposes of analysis, the below terms can be used to reference different aspects of an AMBER Alert.

- *AMBER Alert Plan:* A defined jurisdiction for the activation of an AMBER Alert which may exist at the state, local, regional, tribal, or territorial levels. Plans are generally under the direction of an AMBER Alert coordinator.
- *AMBER Alert Case:* This represents an abduction event for which one or more AMBER Alerts have been activated.
- *AMBER Alert Activation:* One or more AMBER Alert plans may activate their resources for the same abduction event. Each plan that issues an AMBER Alert for a case is considered an activation.
- *Originating AMBER Alert Activation:* This refers to the FIRST plan to activate during an abduction event.
- *Extending AMBER Alert Activation:* Any plan that activates an AMBER Alert after or at the request of the originating AMBER Alert plan.

**AMBER Alert Range:** AMBER Alerts are activated geographically based on the needs of the investigation. A statewide plan may issue an alert for only a single county and some cases may result in activations by multiple AMBER Alert plans. The below terms are used to define the geography of all notifications for an AMBER Alert case.

- *Local:* The activation of the AMBER Alert was limited to a single county.
- *Regional:* The activation of the AMBER Alert was limited to a group of counties within one state or the jurisdiction of a regional plan which includes multiple counties in different states. An example of a regional plan with counties in multiple states would be the Navajo Nation AMBER Alert Plan.
- *Statewide:* An AMBER Alert was activated for the entirety of one state.
- *Multistate:* AMBER Alert plans in more than one state or territory activated for the same AMBER Alert case.

**AMBER Alert Secondary Distribution (AASD):** A network of private companies, social media, technology partners, federal agencies, and others which geographically amplify AMBER Alerts to the public, customers, or their employees. This network is maintained and activated by NCMEC.

**Case Type:** NCMEC categorizes missing child cases based on specific factors for the purposes of case management and data analysis. In this report, all case type analysis is based on the case type at the time of intake by NCMEC.

- *Family abduction (FA)* – A family abduction is defined as the taking, retention, or concealment of a child, younger than 18 years of age, by a parent, other person with a family relationship to the child, or his or her agent, in violation of the custody rights, including visitation rights of a parent or legal guardian.
- *Nonfamily abduction (NFA)* – A nonfamily abduction is defined as the unauthorized taking, retention, luring, confinement, or concealment of a child younger than the age of 18 by someone other than a family member.
- *Lost, injured, or otherwise missing (LIM)* – Lost, injured, or otherwise missing is defined as any missing child younger than the age of 18 when there are insufficient facts to determine the cause of

the child's disappearance or any child 10 years of age or younger who is missing on his or her own accord.

- *Endangered runaway (ERU)* – Any missing child between 11 and 17 years of age who is missing of their own accord and whose whereabouts are unknown to their parent(s) or legal guardian.

**Hoax and Unfounded AMBER Alerts:** Law enforcement activates AMBER Alerts based on information known at the time of a confirmed or suspected abduction, but in some instances when the case is resolved, the information which led to the activation of an AMBER Alert was determined to be false or inaccurate. If it is determined at the conclusion of the investigation that the AMBER Alert criteria would not have been met were all accurate facts available, the AMBER Alert is considered unfounded or a hoax. For example, in some instances a child may have been missing but it was later determined they were not in danger or were not abducted.

- A hoax AMBER Alert occurs when false information is relayed at any point during the investigation to create the impression of an abduction or endangerment which results in law enforcement activating an AMBER Alert.
- An unfounded AMBER alert occurs when an AMBER Alert is activated based on information later determined to be inaccurate.

**International Case:** An AMBER Alert case is considered international if either of the following are true:

- At any point during the abduction incident it was confirmed the child was transported across an international border.
- Based on a significant belief the child had entered the country, an AMBER Alert was activated within the United States for a child missing from another country.

**Motivation:** Motivation analysis is provided based on the best available information regarding the presumed or likely motivation for the abduction of a child. These do not account for other endangerments or reasons why law enforcement believed the child was in imminent danger. AMBER Alerts determined to be a hoax or unfounded are not assigned a motivation. The following categories are used in this report:

- *Criminal Activity:* The child was abducted due to criminal activity not covered by other motivations, such as drug sales or fleeing a crime scene. The child may or may not have a direct involvement in the criminal activity.
- *Domestic (Custodial):* The primary motivation is the custody of the child.
- *Domestic (Other):* Any other domestic incident or dispute led to the abduction of the child or the reason for the domestic incident is unknown. This includes incidents related to romantic relationships involving the child or guardian of the child.
- *Enticement (Online):* The child was initially/primarily groomed or enticed online or via an app. There may be prior in-person meetings, and there may or may not be a sexual component.
- *Enticement (Other):* The child was initially/primarily groomed or enticed in person. There may be secondary technology aspects, and there may or may not be a sexual component.
- *Human Smuggling:* The child was abducted while being transported to gain illegal entry into a foreign country.
- *Infant Abduction:* The taking of a child younger than 12 months of age for the purpose of raising the child as their own. This includes fetal abductions, where a child is forcefully and violently removed from the womb by an abductor for the same purpose.
- *Mental Health Crisis:* The abduction occurred due to a mental health crisis on the part of the abductor.
- *Other:* Any motivations not specified in the definitions of this report.

- *Ransom:* The child was abducted with the intent of collecting ransom.
- *Sexual (No enticement):* The abduction occurred with intent to sexually assault or exploit the child.
- *Substance Use:* The use of drugs or alcohol by the abductor led to the abduction of the child.
- *Trafficking (CST):* The child was abducted in an incident related to child sex trafficking. For example, a child was abducted by a trafficker.
- *Trafficking (Other):* The child was abducted in relation to other forms of human trafficking, such as forced labor or adult commercial sex.
- *Undisclosed:* Law enforcement did not release motivation information to NCMEC.
- *Unknown:* Law enforcement is unable to identify a presumed or likely motivation for abduction.
- *Vehicle Theft:* The child was in a car which was stolen. The abduction is likely unintentional with the car being the primary target of the incident.

**Recovery:** A child is considered recovered when any of the criteria listed below are met. AMBER Alerts involving multiple children may result in recoveries which take place at different times during the investigation.
- Returns home to their parent or legal guardian.
- Remains in the custody of law enforcement.
- Is in contact with their parent or legal guardian but will not be returning home and the parents or legal guardian and law enforcement are satisfied with the situation.
- A child is only considered recovered/deceased by NCMEC if remains have been found and positively identified.

**Resolved:** An AMBER Alert is considered resolved when one of the following criteria are met:
- All children featured in the AMBER Alert have been recovered.
- Law enforcement determines no child was missing, which may happen during AMBER Alerts categorized as hoaxes or unfounded AMBER Alerts.

**Success Story:** A child's recovery is considered a success story when their safe recovery occurred as a direct result of the AMBER Alert being issued. For example, an individual may recognize the vehicle involved in the alert and report the sighting to law enforcement leading to the safe rescue of the child.

**Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA):** Wireless Emergency Alerts are short emergency messages, from authorized federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial public alerting authorities, that can be broadcast from cell towers to any WEA-enabled mobile device in a locally targeted area. Wireless providers primarily use cell broadcast technology for WEA message delivery. WEA is a partnership among FEMA, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), and wireless providers to enhance public safety.[2]

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[2] FEMA. n.d. *Wireless Emergency Alerts.* Accessed March 16, 2023. https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system/public/wireless-emergency-alerts.

# List of Figures

# List of Tables

**2022 AMBER Alert Report**
AMBER Alert Activations
from Jan. 1, 2022, to Dec. 31, 2022
Total = 181

★ Missing Location*

*Hoaxes and unfounded cases are not included.

St. Thomas and
St. John
VI
St. Croix

PR

**Activations by State**
- 0
- 1
- 2 - 4
- 5 - 12
- 13 - 31
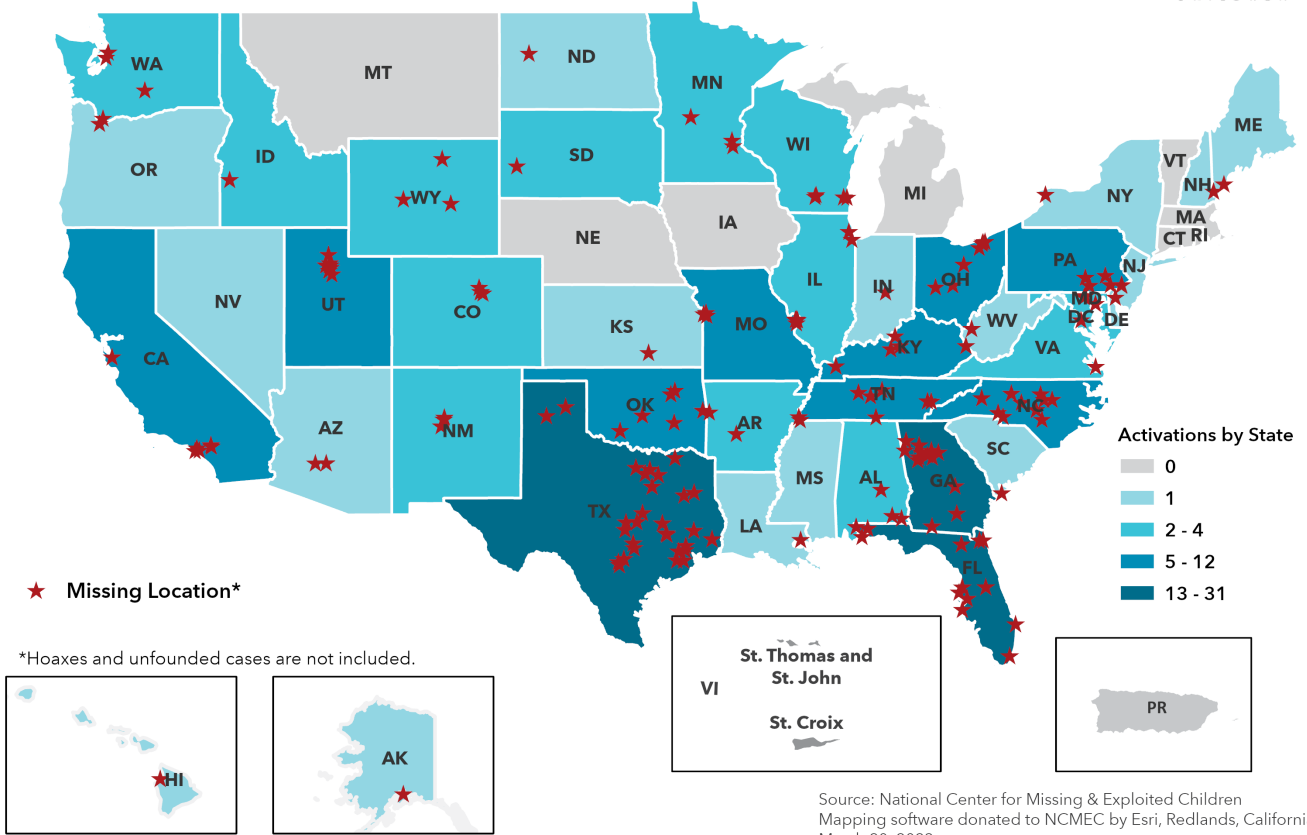
Source: National Center for Missing & Exploited Children
Mapping software donated to NCMEC by Esri, Redlands, California
March 20, 2023