

# THE AMBER ADVOCATE



## AMBER & AMBER

Thirty years after Amber Hagerman's abduction and murder, her unsolved case provides critical lessons and an alerting legacy of protecting other children.

AMBER Alert 8:39  
San Francisco, CA - 3-year-old boy, br. eyes, br hair, last seen 1140 hrs, at Lombard and State, SUVR 2005 Honda Accord, LIC: DRE 1359 (CA)



AMBER Alert 9:00  
Montevideo ID: Allen Fischer 13, 5'09", 135lbs, Blue eyes, Blonde hair, Blue shirt, Blue jeans and Rachelle Fischer 15, 5'05", 135lbs Blue eyes, Brown hair, green dress. Last seen at 7pm 6/22 in. May be headed to a FLDS Group in Mardon UT. How they are traveling is unclear. May be with Adult siblings. <https://IMJY4364> Look for a 2018 Chevy Tahoe with front-end damage, GA Plate ABC-456. Suspect unknown. Do not approach. Call 911.

GA Plate ABC-456. Suspect unknown. Do not approach. Call 911.



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## EDITORS' NOTES



**Text in bold purple** denotes hyperlinks with additional details. Download the PDF at [AMBERAdvocate.org](https://AMBERAdvocate.org) to interact with hyperlinks.



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# THE AMBERADVOCATE

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*Amber Hagerman with her brother, Ricky*

# Overarching lessons from the Amber Hagerman case

Thirty years after her abduction and murder, Amber Hagerman's legacy is the AMBER Alert system, which has saved thousands of children in peril worldwide.

**O**n January 13, 1996, 9-year-old Amber Hagerman's life was stolen by a stranger who dragged her kicking and screaming from her bicycle in broad daylight. Despite an unrelenting search and dedicated efforts by law enforcement, the media, and the public, Amber would never make it home. She was found brutally murdered. Her loss devastated her family and community, leaving a wound that has yet to heal.

In the months following the third-grader's abduction and killing, Dallas-Fort Worth-area broadcasters worked with local police to establish what they hoped

would be an antidote to future crimes: the America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response (AMBER) Alert—named in Amber's honor, both to remember her and to protect children in the future. It would harness the power of technology, the media, and community action to spread urgent news when a child's life was in danger.

It took almost a decade to get every U.S. state to adopt the alert system, but as of December 2025, AMBER Alerts have helped recover more than 1,292 children nationwide—241 of them rescued because of wireless emergency alerts (WEAs).

"Though Amber's life was heartbreakingly short, her legacy has been to save countless lives. Each time an AMBER Alert flashes across a screen or sounds on a phone, her name is carried forward—not just as a reminder of tragedy, but as a symbol of hope, protection, and action," says Janell Rasmussen, Administrator of the AMBER Alert Training & Technical Assistance

Program and Director of the National Criminal Justice Training Center of Fox Valley Technical College.

Amber's case also underscores fundamental lessons that child protection professionals should consider as they navigate missing child incidents.

**“Every time I hear an AMBER Alert, I think, ‘It’s time to go to work, Sis. Do your thing.’**

**Ricky Hagerman**

Younger brother of Amber Hagerman—from "Amber: The Girl Behind the Alert" (Peacock, 2023)

### Rapid public communication is vital.

Before Amber's case, police lacked a formal framework for instantly broadcasting information about child abductions to the public. The AMBER Alert system was created specifically to fill this gap, leveraging radio,

TV, and eventually wireless technology to send out critical information like descriptions of the child, suspect, and vehicle.

"Amber's case was a witnessed abduction—the rarest of all—and there was credible information available about the suspected abductor and his truck," says Chuck Fleeger,

## Amber's Legacy: A Timeline

The AMBER Alert program mobilizes communities to find abducted children. By broadcasting urgent details through television, radio, highway signs, and mobile phones, the system harnesses public power to bring them home safely. Thousands of children have been rescued thanks to this system. This timeline highlights significant events over the past three decades.



Amber Hagerman

### 1998: First Successful Recovery

Eight-week-old Rae-Leigh Bradbury became the first child recovered due to an AMBER Alert in Arlington, Texas. She was found unharmed 90 minutes after the alert was issued.



Rae-Leigh Bradbury

### 1996: A Tragic Catalyst

In January, 9-year-old Amber Hagerman's abduction and murder in Arlington, Texas, sparked a community outcry, leading to the creation of the first AMBER Alert Plan for missing children.

Region 3 Liaison for the AMBER Alert Training & Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP). “There just wasn’t a mechanism then to get that information out quickly and to the widest possible audience.”

AATTAP’s Region 3 spans 10 states, from Louisiana to Nebraska to Arizona. It also encompasses Fleeger’s home state of Texas, where since 2003 he has served as executive director of the AMBER Alert Network Brazos Valley, a non-profit in central Texas that assists with regional AMBER Alert coordination, provides public education, and partners with local law enforcement and other responders in alerting, response, and investigative readiness.

In 2020 Fleeger retired as Assistant Chief of Police with the College Station Police Department, where he served for more than three decades. He now teaches AMBER Alert investigative best practices courses for the AATTAP.

### Time is of the essence.

Experts recognized that the first few hours are the most critical in a child abduction case. The AMBER Alert protocol emphasizes speed, ensuring that law enforcement, broadcasters, and transportation agencies react swiftly to reports.



Though Amber’s life was heartbreakingly short, her legacy has been to save countless lives. Each time an AMBER Alert flashes across a screen or sounds on a phone, her name is carried forward—not just as a reminder of tragedy, but as a symbol of hope, protection, and action.

### Janell Rasmussen

Administrator, AMBER Alert Training & Technical Assistance Program  
Director, National Criminal Justice Training Center



#### 2002: International Expansion

Canada became the first country outside the U.S. to adopt its own AMBER Alert program, marking the system’s first official international expansion.



#### 2002: State Plans and Highway Signs

Texas implemented the first statewide AMBER Alert system. That same year, California became the first state to use electronic highway signs, leading to the rescue of two abducted teens.



#### 2003: National System

President George W. Bush signed the PROTECT Act establishing AMBER Alerts nationwide. The AMBER Alert Training & Technical Assistance Program (AATTAP) is also formed.

Balancing that need for speed with a desire for accuracy can be a struggle for AMBER Alert Coordinators. "Law enforcement wrestles with the desire to verify information is complete and accurate, but then it's not timely; conversely, you can have timely information but some of it's not completely accurate. That's OK. It's better to get the process going even if an activation package isn't perfect," Fleeger says. "We all know how crucial time is, so any moments that can be saved could potentially make the difference in a child's recovery."

Successfully navigating such a high-stakes process "takes a combination of continuing education, experience, and good communication with others," says Fleeger's colleague Joan Collins, Liaison for AATTAP's Region 1 (encompassing 11 states in the Northeast, from Maine to West Virginia).

Collins' career has involved 39 years of work for Rhode Island law enforcement. She spent 28 of those years with the Rhode Island State Police, where she helped audit and train users of the Rhode Island Law Enforcement Telecommunications System (RILETS); was central to increasing the state's various emergency alerts; managed the state's sex offender/"Most Wanted" databases; and



**Long-term cases like Amber Hagerman's are solvable. Technology continues to evolve and so do peoples' lives. People will decide to talk for whatever reason when circumstances change.**

### Chuck Fleeger

Region 3 Liaison, AMBER Alert Training & Technical Assistance Program

#### 2004: Standardized Criteria

The U.S. Department of Justice developed and shared recommended criteria for issuing AMBER Alerts. This guidance helped create consistency for alert activation across the country.



#### 2006: Commemorative Stamp

The U.S. Postal Service honored the program's importance by releasing a commemorative postage stamp, raising national awareness for the life-saving alert system.



- Abduction**
- Imminent Danger**
- Sufficient Victim & Abduction Detail**
- Child 17 or Under**
- Critical Data in NCIC System**

**2005: A Nationwide Network**  
Hawaii completed its statewide plan, creating a network of AMBER Alert systems across all 50 states. The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children launched its secondary distribution network with private partners to expand alert reach.



worked with the state's Internet Crimes Against Children task force.

"Doing this line of work involves being an active listener—of knowing what questions to ask," she says. Collins now teaches such AATTAP courses as AMBER Alert: To Activate or Not Activate as well as 911 Telecommunicators and Missing & Abducted Children (aka "911 T-MAC").

### Coordination is key.

The AMBER Alert system functions through the seamless cooperation of multiple groups, including law enforcement, broadcasters, transportation agencies, and the media. Reviews of every alert help to improve the process over time by getting input from these various partners.

Collins recommends that partners include not only those within one's own law enforcement agency, but also those from surrounding states ("with whom you're likely to work with more often than not"). "It's important to connect with your counterparts elsewhere and build relationships with them early so you can act together quickly and successfully," she says. "It's always a relief to know others are ready and willing to help out during times of high stress, and they in turn will appreciate your advice and support."



#### 2012: Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA)

AMBER Alerts were integrated into the Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) system. This allowed geotargeted emergency text messages to be sent directly to mobile phones for the first time.

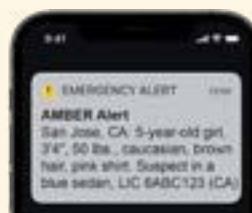


#### 2013: First WEA Rescue and European Expansion

A teen's tip from a WEA alert led to the system's first recovery. That same year, AMBER Alert Europe was founded to link alerts across borders.

#### 2011: Social Media Integration

Dedicated AMBER Alert pages were created on Facebook for each state. This move expanded the system's reach into the rapidly growing world of social media to disseminate alerts.



### Protocols must be followed carefully.

For any case—which can potentially become a high-profile one—there is a need for law enforcement to meticulously follow established protocols. This includes the difficult decisions an AMBER Alert Coordinator must make with the limited information available at the time, which may be criticized by the public later.

"With any missing child case, law enforcement should first assume the child is at risk until evidence presents otherwise," Fleeger says.

He also recommends patrol first responders consider the long-term implications of their efforts, avoiding any pass-the-buck mentality of case stewardship. "Think about the officers dispatched to Amber's case. They certainly didn't know when they started their shift that three decades later the case would be unsolved—and how dramatically changed available resources and response models would become." It's essential to remember that "the right documentation of information really matters. And if we're doing good, solid police work from the earliest moments, that work should stand the test of time and hold up well."

### Use targeted, advanced technology.

Modern AMBER Alerts benefit from geotargeting, which focuses alerts on the

people most likely to have seen the child. This prevents citizens in a wider area from being desensitized and ignoring alerts.

### The public can help.

AMBER Alert's success is a testament to the power of community vigilance. It allows millions of people to serve as the "eyes and ears" for law enforcement by reporting tips to the authorities. To keep the public from "information burnout" on a case, Fleeger recommends using multiple photos of a missing child at different times. "If someone is scrolling through their feed on social media and see the same photo time and again, they'll assume they've already read that information," he says. "A new or different photo will make somebody pause and think, 'I didn't realize he is still missing.' The goal is to keep the case a priority in the public's mind until we can get that person found."

**“The goal is to keep the case a priority in the public’s mind until we can get that person found.”**

Chuck Fleeger

Region 3 Liaison, AMBER Alert Training & Technical Assistance Program

is calling about normally outside barking, or does it rarely bark? This could indicate whether something unusual is occurring. It's important not to make assumptions, as callers may have relevant information that can be discovered by asking further questions."

### Don't assume benign circumstances.

Before the AMBER Alert system, bystanders witnessing a child struggling with an adult may have assumed it was a family dispute or the child misbehaving. Amber's case highlights the danger of assuming an abduction is a benign event and reinforces the importance of reporting suspicious activity immediately—even if it seems inconsequential.

Collins refers to the barking dog analogy in her teaching. She encourages dispatchers in training to ask questions and gather more information. "For example, is the dog that someone

#### 2015: Major Tech Integration

Major tech companies including Google, Facebook, and Waze integrated AMBER Alerts into their platforms, dramatically expanding the alerts' digital reach to millions of users.



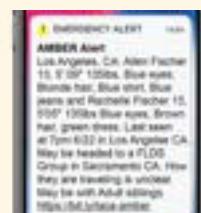
Ashlynne Mike

#### 2018: Hyperlink Innovation

The California Highway Patrol was the first agency to embed hyperlinks in its alerts, giving the public immediate access to photos and expanded case details.

#### 2018: AMBER Alert in Indian Country

The Ashlynne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act was signed into law. Later that year, the Navajo Nation issued its first sovereign alert, safely recovering a missing infant.





**Joan Collins**

Region 1 Liaison, AMBER Alert Training & Technical Assistance Program

**The creation of the AMBER Alert system has become an important public global safety tool for child abductions, and there is ongoing hope for the resolution of Amber Hagerman's case. The goal is to safely recover an abducted child. The decisions made by AMBER Alert Coordinators are often stressful, made quickly and under pressure, following established protocols and using their best judgment based on the information at hand.**

### **Stranger abductions are real.**

While statistically rare—the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children reports that stranger abductions account for 1% of reported abductions—they are a real danger. Amber's case serves as a reminder of the vulnerability of children, especially when a predator targets them. According to NCMEC, victims are most often girls, and the average age for attempted abductions is 11 and completed abductions is 14.

remains unsolved decades later. The lesson is that the fight for justice continues, and the public can still assist by reporting any strange observations. "Long-term cases like Amber Hagerman's are solvable," Fleeger says. "Technology continues to evolve and so do peoples' lives. People will decide to talk for whatever reason when circumstances change. Consider the Austin [Texas] yogurt shop murder case that was recently solved. You just never know."

### **Justice is a long process.**

Despite the creation of a system that has saved countless lives, Amber's murder



#### **2022: First Indian Country System**

Washington state established the nation's first Indian Country Alert system in 2022, adapting the AMBER model to address the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP).



#### **2020: 1,000th Child Rescued**

The 1,000th AMBER Alert success story occurred with the safe recovery of four children from the Northern Arapaho Tribe after a citizen saw the alert and contacted law enforcement.



Source: Governor Jay Inslee Administration

#### **2025: TikTok Partnership**

A partnership with TikTok brought AMBER Alerts to the platform's "For You" feeds, reaching over 170 million Americans nationwide with critical, time-sensitive information about missing children.



## 'Her death was not in vain.'

*-Sergeant Mark Simpson (Ret.)*

Three decades after Amber Hagerman's 1996 abduction inspired the AMBER Alert, her case remains unsolved. We spoke with the lead investigators—past and present—about the relentless hunt for justice.

**A**s the 30th anniversary of Amber Hagerman's murder approaches, the search for her killer continues. Mark Simpson, the case's original investigative supervisor at the Arlington Police Department (APD) from 1996 to 2007, reflects on a crime that transformed policing.

"We realized ... we didn't have a major case response plan," he recalls. The tragedy forced advancements, most notably the AMBER Alert system, but for Simpson, the goal remains: "to see the case solved."

Today, that mission falls to APD Detective Krystallyne Robinson. She keeps Amber's portrait near her desk as a daily reminder. Despite thousands of leads and decades of work, the case is far from cold; tips still arrive weekly. Robinson is now vetting labs for advanced DNA testing, driven by the same unwavering goal: "to get justice."

# 'Learning As We Were Going'

**Texan Mark Simpson was the Arlington Police Department's investigative supervisor on the Amber Hagerman case from the time of her abduction and murder in 1996 until 2007, when he retired after a 32-year career with the APD. We recently caught up with him to discuss his recollections of the case—and what he wants more than anything: "to see the case solved and justice served."**

## **As we approach the 30th anniversary of the Amber Hagerman abduction and murder, what goes through your mind?**

The likelihood that whoever committed the crime may still be out there troubles me. But I also look at everything that resulted from Amber's death—the advancements law enforcement has made, not only in training but also investigative tactics, and our ability to respond to child abductions, including the AMBER Alert system—that we didn't have before. It's horrible that it took this little girl's death to do that, but at least her death was not in vain.

## **What were some advancements within the Arlington Police Department?**

We realized pretty quickly into Amber's investigation that we didn't have a major case response plan. For a situation requiring immediate, extensive deployment of personnel, who would we deploy? How long would we deploy them? In a major



**I know with certainty that we did everything that we could do to push the case forward, so I have no regrets.**

**Mark Simpson**

Retired Investigative Supervisor  
Arlington Police Department Homicide Unit

deployment, you can push people 18 hours, 20 hours, sometimes more, but then they start to make mistakes. And afterward, if you haven't accomplished what you set out to do, what is the follow-up plan? There's got to be a transition into another group of detectives who can keep the investigation moving. We had a lot to learn—and rapidly.

## **Was this a precursor to a child abduction response team (CART)?**

I wish we'd had the tremendous forethought to create a CART back then, but our work was more reactionary. Later, when I began teaching for the National Criminal Justice Training Center (NCJTC) of Fox Valley Technical College, the emphasis on CART creation was bringing in people from different disciplines, from different jurisdictions, people who each brought something different to the table. But

at the time, our team was learning as we were going.

### How did you keep up with all the investigative leads?

Leads management was a huge learning curve. Unless you've ever been hit with a case like the Hagerman one, it's hard to describe the amount of intelligence that comes in very quickly. We investigated more than 7,000 leads during my tenure. And a lot of that information was time sensitive. To manage it, we needed to learn how to get the information into a searchable database, how to collate it, how to determine what needed to be dealt with immediately, and how to quickly get the information to the people who could use it. We also had endless rows of three-ring binders with hard copies of investigative reports to organize. That was extremely labor- and resource-intensive, but we didn't want to be in a situation where we might be reinvestigating the same lead over and over.

### How has Amber's case weighed on you?

Well, justice has yet to be served to the killer. That bothers me. And what was done to Amber is not the kind of thing that you go into a bar and have a few drinks and brag to your buddies about. It's something you either take to your grave or wind up letting slip to someone very close to you. So I can only hope that someone will one day talk, and that will lead to a reckoning for Amber's death. Someone needs to be held to account.

### And as for the investigation?

I know with certainty that we did everything that we could do to push the case forward, so I have no regrets. I was given every resource I asked for, and even got to handpick the people who investigated the

case. They were considered some of the brightest minds around.

### Tell us about the investigative task force.

When Amber was first abducted, the city devoted 45 detectives and four sergeants to her case alone. I was one of those four sergeants. Within about 30 days, we pared it back to 15 detectives and one sergeant, with that sergeant being me. I chose people who were very good at their jobs—at interviewing, at interrogations, who had strong attention to detail, who had a deep sense of integrity. We were a standalone task force for about 18 months until our time came to a close, which was hard. The people on that task force, when they left, they left in tears. These were grown men who did not want to quit. But after the task force disbanded and I went back to working homicide, the case followed our team there and we kept it alive.

### Did that spur your decision to open a cold case unit?

It was one of the reasons. We wanted to stay focused on Amber's case as long as we could. For context, we decided a cold case would be one that had gone 120 days without a viable lead. But interestingly, during my time with the Arlington Police Department, Amber's case never went 120 days without actionable intelligence. So technically it never went cold.

### What was the most challenging aspect of working the case?

Keeping an aggressive investigative stance. Time is your enemy during child abduction investigations, since the longer they go, the more likely that people's memories will fade, and crime scenes yet to be identified will be corrupted or disappear. You've got to keep



**January 13, 1996**

**3 p.m.:** Donna Norris (nee Whitson) arrives with her children, Amber and Ricky Hagerman, at her parents' home in Arlington, Texas. Donna agrees to let the children ride their bikes if they stay close.

**3:15 p.m.:** Amber and Ricky travel about two blocks to the back of an abandoned Winn-Dixie grocery store where there was a "cool ramp"; Ricky turns to head back to the house. Amber says she will be right behind him.

**3:18 p.m.:** Neighborhood witness Jim Kevil calls 911 to report Amber's abduction by a man in his 20s or 30s driving a black or dark-color pickup truck without obvious detailing. He is reported to be Hispanic or Caucasian, of medium build, and less than 6 feet tall. He pulled Amber off her bike, kicking and screaming, and forced her into the driver's side of his cab.

**January 17, 1996**

**11:39 p.m.:** Amber's body is discovered in a drainage culvert behind an apartment complex in Arlington, about 3.2 miles away from the abduction site. Amber is wearing only one white sock. Her throat has been cut several times.

moving very deliberately, with as much speed as possible, and leave no stone unturned. But you also have to be mindful not to investigate so many things at one time that you wind up not doing any of the tasks well. My job was to make sure that the 15 detectives on our task force had the resources they needed to do the job, that they had the freedom to make good decisions, and I could help them keep extraneous baloney at bay. For the most part, that was allowed to happen. The goal was to keep everyone from feeling overwhelmed. That's when you lose track of your priorities.

### How did you try to boost morale?

One way was in our command post. I kept a timeline of our work that ran all the way around the room and continued yet again. The reason I did so was twofold. One reason was for easy reference. But the other was to have a visual representation of what we were doing as a team. Leads were coming in hand

over fist, and I wanted them to see what they were getting done—not only to develop new strategies from what everyone was finding, but also to underscore that while we didn't have an arrest, we were still making progress.

### Tell us about your relationship with Amber's family.

Relationships in such cases can be complex, but we all became pretty close. The family knew they could call us 24/7/365, which was important. Most people do better when they approach something from a position of knowledge, so we made sure lines of communication stayed open. We had several formalized briefings with them, but over time we slowed that down simply because there wasn't much new to share. It was about that time when I could see Donna losing patience with us. She appeared on television and said some not-very-nice things about me. But I realized it wasn't personal. She was just

frustrated because she didn't know exactly what was happening.

### **How did the situation resolve?**

Our victim assistance coordinator, Derrelynne Perryman, told me that Donna wanted to visit the command post. I said, 'No. We have sensitive information in there; nothing good could come from that.' Well, Derrelynne worked on me for about a week until I relented. I said, 'OK, Donna can come up, but here's a list of things she can't do in there. She can't be left alone, or take any pictures, that kind of thing.' So Donna comes up to the post, and all the detectives clear out except for me. She sits down and looks around for what seemed like an hour but was probably only 10 minutes. She then gets up and walks out. And I thought, well, that wasn't so bad. A few days later Derrelynne returns and says, 'Donna wants to come back to the command post.' So again, I say no, but again I get talked into it. This time Donna comes in with a paper sack. And in that sack is a framed photo of Amber. It was a Christmas picture, one that wound up being used on many of Amber's flyers. She wanted us to hang Amber's picture on the wall, which we did. She also gave us a Native American Kokopelli figurine. She wanted that in there with us too for some reason. Then she took a piece of paper and a Sharpie and wrote 'Amber's Room' on it. She wanted that on the door of the command post. So I had an actual sign made that read "Amber's Room"—one that could replace 'Conference Room 3.' And that was the beginning of the change between the Arlington Police Department and Donna. She just needed to see we were doing something. She wasn't sure exactly what we were doing, but she could see it was progress. She also felt a personal connection to the space. It dawned on me then that you have to think outside

the box in your work with families, especially if you feel like you're losing touch with them. I'd been too focused on what you might call less holistic things until Derrelynne, and Donna, helped me see that.

### **What do you remember about the public's reaction to the case?**

When I think about when Amber was abducted, I don't know exactly how to describe it, but the city and the news media was like an animal that had to be fed. People were just absolutely incensed that this type of crime could happen in our community.

### **What do you think most resonated with people?**

Looking back on it, one difference was the media's use of video. WFAA Channel 8 had been shooting a documentary about Amber and her family for a story about families living on, and off, welfare, and that footage really struck a chord with people. People felt like they knew Amber. We didn't just have a photograph of her, but we had moments with Amber—her riding her bicycle, her doing homework, her playing with her little brother, Ricky. That video really brought that little girl to life, and made so many people want to do something to help.

### **Tell us about your relationship with the media during that time.**

Historically, law enforcement has tried to keep the media at arm's length. But my philosophy was to give the media anything and everything if it didn't negatively impact our investigation. The more they knew, the better off we could be with our police work, especially since the media helps us connect with the public. If we'd chosen to shut out the media, they would have hunted for information on their own that may not have been accurate. I never saw a downside

to providing them with accurate and timely information whenever possible.

### **What do you think about how technology has changed in the past 30 years?**

Unfortunately, our work occurred during a very different time. We didn't have the ability to geolocate cellphones in a certain area or have license plate readers check tags near a specific location. There were no doorbell cameras.

Back then there was only one security camera at a convenience store across the street from where Amber was abducted—and the camera wasn't outside, but inside, pointed down on a register, so they could watch themselves get robbed. The electronic fingerprints people leave behind now are huge. But there's one skill that need not get lost among the technological advances. Investigators should maintain the ability to simply talk with people. That also yields important results.

### **What did you know about DNA evidence at the time of Amber's investigation?**

We knew enough about it to hang onto whatever evidence we could to await future advances in the technology, which was in its infancy at the time. There are so many options for DNA testing now, so many potential strategies that we didn't have back then. As time goes on, that will do nothing but expand.

### **What advice do you give law enforcement about improving responses to missing child cases?**

What's important is to have a plan. Know what you're going to do if this type of case happens so that you can move rapidly and deliberately to get the investigation off the ground. Also, get trained. Nobody has any better instructors or better materials or message than the NCJTC and AMBER Alert Training & Technical Assistance Program. It's no good trying to figure things out in a parking lot somewhere

while your suspect is fleeing somewhere with your victim. Lastly, stay current on your resources—personnel, equipment, specialized assistance. Because over time, resources will change. You might have people with a particular investigative strength today, but in six months, they may have moved on. Who will replace them? That's a planning reality that shouldn't be overlooked.

## **On the Case**

**Arlington Police Department Homicide Detective Krystallyne Robinson has been the lead detective on the Amber Hagerman case since summer 2023. We recently had the chance to ask her a few questions.**

### **What's your perspective on the 30th anniversary of Amber's case?**

It's a huge milestone—one that gives us the opportunity to keep the focus on Amber while encouraging the public to share what they may know about the case.

### **On the 25th anniversary the Arlington PD discussed the possibility of DNA testing being used for the investigation. What's the latest on that?**

Since the amount of physical evidence that we have is very limited, I'm in the process of vetting labs to make sure they can do what we need them to without consuming the entire sample. Given the advancements in technology—that are just continuing to advance—I'm hopeful about the work the labs can do.

### What else should we know about the case?

I want people to know this case isn't on the backburner for the Arlington Police Department, or for me. It's important for our department to solve this crime.

### What drives you forward to do that?

I keep a framed portrait of Amber in my office. It's near my desk, and it's the first thing I look at every day. That means there's literally not a day that goes by that I'm at work and I don't think about her.

### What's your investigative approach, given the years that have passed?

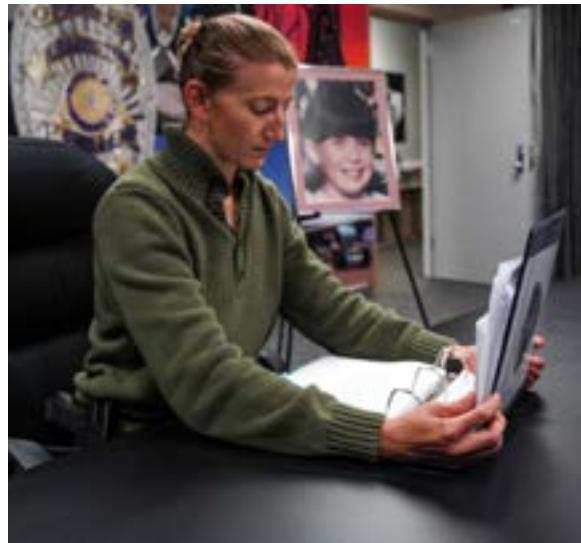
It's important that I continually have a fresh approach to the case, and keep an open mind. I teach a lot at the academy, and tell the recruits, you have to be self-consciously aware of the things that you're doing and in the way you approach your investigations. That's true for any case, but especially Amber's. We have to just keep digging—digging into the leads and the evidence.

### How often do you get leads on the case?

We get phone calls, emails, and letters about the case at least weekly. I know I don't go a month without receiving an email or phone call related to it.

### What would you say to Amber's family?

As Amber's mother knows, I've put a lot of work into this case—going through every report and previous detectives' narratives. Our goal is always to get justice, and that's what we're aiming for. We also never want Amber's name to be forgotten.



**I keep a framed portrait of Amber in my office. It's near my desk, and it's the first thing I look at every day. That means there's literally not a day that goes by that I'm at work and I don't think about her.**

**Detective Krystallyne Robinson**

Arlington Police Department Homicide Unit

# NEWS BRIEFS

## Texas operation brings home 30 missing minors

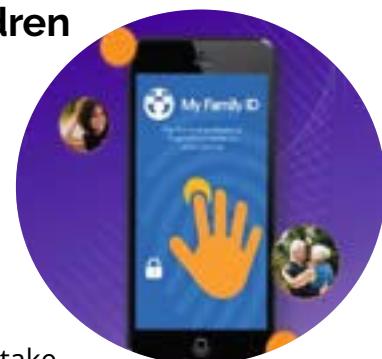
More than two dozen missing children have been **found** in Texas after a nearly three-week operation. Ten agencies including the San Antonio Police, Bexar County Sheriff's Office, and the New Braunfels Police Department teamed up with the U.S. Marshals Western District of Texas (USMWDT) to make Operation Lightning Bug happen. Local and federal agencies worked together to bring home missing children listed in a local database called the Texas Crime Information Center. Deputies worked from July 28 to Aug. 15 to rescue six sex trafficking victims and more than 30 missing minors.

They made at least three arrests along the way. Marshal Jose Nunez with the USMWDT is calling the operation a success. "This was the first time we worked together with our state and local partners with an operation like this," which resulted in locating missing children and disrupting any type of trafficking networks, he said.



## Digital fingerprinting app helps ID missing children

As a young detective, Charles Still would pour through files on his desk as he handled upwards of 70 open cases of missing children. Now retired from the Tustin, California, Police Department, he's tapping into technology to try to streamline the process and reunite families faster. His **My Family ID** app gathers digital fingerprints and a 3D scan of a child (or at-risk adult). This critical information can be stored on a cell phone—without being shared with a third party—and easily sent to authorities if an emergency arises. Still said the app's game-changer is that it forces the user to take a photo that can be used with artificial intelligence and is formatted for **facial recognition**. The \$4.99 app is available for iPhones and Android phones.



## Eagle-eyed friends spot car wanted in AMBER Alert

Shortly after phones in Prince George's County, Maryland, began **buzzing** about a SUV wanted in a suspected child abduction, a group of friends captured the moment they recognized the SUV from the AMBER Alert—and started recording. In a viral **TikTok** **video** posted by one of the friends, a gray Volkswagen SUV rolls up alongside them, and they elicit excited recognition. Deciding not to engage with the suspect (as law enforcement had instructed), the clip ends with a short view of the SUV surrounded by police vehicles farther up the road. "Thanks to a great community partnership, an alert citizen [in another vehicle] spotted the AMBER Alert car," the Prince George's County Police Department wrote on X. The citizen contacted dispatch who relayed the locations through the interoperable radio system. The missing girl was found safe.



## \$10K reward offered for discovery of 13-year-old

A combined \$10,000 reward is being offered for information leading to the discovery of 13-year-old **Sa'Wade Birdinground**, last seen at her grandparents' home on the Crow Indian Reservation in Garryowen, Montana, October 6, 2024. The FBI's Salt Lake City Field Office offered a \$5,000 award that was matched by the executive branch of the Crow Tribe, of which Birdinground is a member. After announcing the reward this summer, people in the community held a walk and presentation of red balloons at Little Big Horn College to symbolize collective hope and continued efforts to bring Birdinground home. "For eight months, Sa'wade's family has had to know life without her," said FBI special agent Mehtab Syed at a **press conference**. "Sa'Wade is not forgotten. We're doing anything in our power to bring her home." A tip line has opened exclusively for information on the case. "No tip is too small or insignificant," Syed said.



## Bill proposes better care for Indigenous families

**Draft legislation** by Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski—the federal Native Children's Commission Implementation **Act** of 2025—calls for increased funding and new programs aimed at improving the well-being of Indigenous children and their families. It also seeks to address a wide range of issues including health, housing, and education. Public feedback on the proposal closed this fall, and will be incorporated in the draft bill expected to be introduced on the U.S. Senate floor at some point in 2026. "I look forward to hearing from Tribal leaders, advocates, and non-profits supporting Native families as we work to improve policies that directly impact their communities," said Murkowski, chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. Millions of dollars are proposed for Tribally run child welfare and juvenile justice programs, as well as culturally appropriate mental health and substance use services. Proposed initiatives include Tribal advisory committees on juvenile justice and maternal health; a nationwide examination of the number and status of all missing Indigenous children cases; and an Office on Native Children at the Department of the Interior, which would, in part, serve as a clearinghouse for federal data and grant opportunities.



## AIIC team attend MMIP memorial in Alaska

Members of AATTAP's AMBER Alert in Indian Country (AIIC) team attended a powerful missing and murdered Indigenous persons (MMIP) memorial bench dedication in Fairbanks, Alaska, hosted by the **Tanana Chiefs Conference**. The event brought together families, Tribal leaders, and community members to honor the lives of those tragically taken or still missing. The dedication included heartfelt speeches and the reading of 48 names, each one representing a person, a story, and a life stolen. "We are committed to working with our partners to ensure that every community has the resources to respond swiftly when a child goes missing and to honor those we've lost by protecting those still with us," said AIIC Program Manager Tyesha M. Wood. Added AATTAP Administrator/National Criminal Justice Training Center Director Janell Rasmussen, "Being surrounded by families and communities who carry such a deep pain and resilience is a powerful reminder of why we do this work."



## European museums display children's drawings to spotlight international parental child abduction

Art and cultural institutions across five European countries **teamed up** this summer to display children's drawings to raise awareness about international parental abduction (IPCA), which reportedly **spikes** that time of year. In partnership with Missing Children Europe, the museums have displayed children's artwork to raise awareness of IPCA, which involves one parent taking a child across borders without the other parent's consent or legal authorization, a move that can have a deeply harmful impact on a child's well-being and safety. This multilingual campaign, as part of the **Finding Home** project, uses powerful imagery as well as a child-friendly website and QR codes to inform people about IPCA. The website also provides resources for children and parents facing such a crisis via clear, practical information and guidance on how to respond to such situations. Art venues including the Videogame Museum in Rome, the Museum of Illusions in Madrid, and the National Iconographic Museum Onufri of Berat participated in the campaign to highlight this often-underreported issue to the public, spark conversations, and remind people of the need for children to feel safe.



## UAE contributes to training officers involved in international operation against child sexual abuse

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), represented by the Ministry of Interior and in coordination with the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) recently **contributed** to the training of law enforcement officers in 10 Latin American countries that participated in the international operation against online child sexual exploitation and abuse. The operation was led by Argentina and carried out simultaneously in 15 countries, including Brazil, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Mexico, Dominican Republic, and the United States. The training program was conducted in the Argentinian capital of Buenos Aires as part of the Artificial Intelligence for Safer Children initiative **launched** by UNICRI and the UAE Ministry of Interior in 2020, with the mission of strengthening the capabilities of law enforcement agencies around the world to employ artificial intelligence to combat sexual crimes against children.



## Irish authorities investigating 52 cases of international parental child abduction

Ireland's Central Authority—which works with the country's Department of Justice to handle international parental child abduction (IPCA) cases—is attempting to resolve 52 cases involving missing children, **reports** *The Irish Times*. As of August 7, 2025, the organization was working on 39 cases in which a parent is in Ireland, but their child or children have been taken to another country, and 13 “incoming” cases where a parent who lives abroad is seeking the return of their child from Ireland. In most cases of missing children (30 out of 39 cases) these children are thought to be elsewhere in Europe, with nine cases involving kids suspected of being much farther afield. Eight of the 13 incoming cases relate to children who were previously located elsewhere in Europe, with five cases involving kids who were previously outside Europe.



# COURSES OF ACTION



AATTAP courses



Indian Country  
(AIIC) courses



AMBER Alert  
resources

Trusted, timely & actionable information—at your fingertips. Simply focus your smartphone camera on these QR codes to access the latest training & networking opportunities for child protection professionals.



AIIC website



Find AMBER  
Alert partners



Family/sibling  
survival guides



AMBERAdvocate.org