

AMBER ALERT NATIONAL INITIATIVE — CHILD ABDUCTIONS

206. Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI to the Minister for Police:

What is the government doing to enable police and the community to respond immediately to child abductions—a terrifying crime no-one would wish upon any parent?

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS replied:

I thank the member for Kingsley for the question. As a mum herself, as most mums and dads have, she has probably experienced a moment—in a shopping centre, a department store, at the Royal Show or when seeing a gate or door open—when she has thought her child has gone missing. We know that heart-thumping moment when one thinks: Where are they? Where have they gone? Has someone taken them? Have they wandered off? For most of us that is just a few minutes, and it happens now and again in the bringing up of children. But some people—fortunately these cases are rare—have had their children abducted. Sometimes children will wander off or go missing and there will be a real concern that they could be in imminent danger of injury or death.

As part of a national link-up today, we are joining an initiative called Amber Alert in conjunction with all other states and territories. It is an initiative of the Australian Federal Police through the National Missing Persons Coordination Centre. It allows for a Facebook message to go out; it will be the second item on people's newsfeeds within the broader location from where the child has gone missing. An instant alert will go out. There was an incident last year in Victoria Park in which a child was in a situation like this, and Facebook proved to be immensely useful in the retrieval of that child, who was found in a car. Through the social media network Facebook, residents of Vic Park searched not only their front yards and down streets, but some also took the initiative to look down laneways and the like, and that is how young Joe was found.

This government really supports the national initiative, Amber Alert. It means that searches will be much more coordinated and will be done in conjunction with police. With the permission of the parents a photograph and appropriate details of the area in which the child has gone missing will be included. Whilst people will not be able to post comments on the notification, they will be able to share the information. Most people have their location enabled on their social media networks, but people who do not may not get the alert, but many of their friends in the community will, and through their sharing of the information, people who do not have their location enabled will receive that information from their network.

This will complement existing police procedures and it is about moving with the times. We know that the first hour or so after a child goes missing is the most important in respect of recovery. This will complement the usual police procedures and the information that goes out through traditional media and the like. It will go directly to people through their Facebook account and it will be the second item in their newsfeed. People will be able to share it and, hopefully, it will mean that some children can be located much more quickly than they might otherwise have been and hopefully saved from some harm.

The SPEAKER: Members, before we have the last question I want to let everyone know that in future members will not be able to stand and ask a question with something written on the back of a prop. We gave a bit of leeway today. A minister can use a prop, but I will not allow anyone to have things written on the back that could be offensive to anyone in the chamber.