STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS


When an AMBER Alert flashes across your screen, you are immediately made aware of three key pieces of information: that a child has gone missing, the identifying details of the child or suspect, and how to report potential sightings to law enforcement. By alerting the surrounding public of the emergency, AMBER Alerts are instrumental in finding and safely returning children to their families.

AMBER Alerts have been a resounding success in safely locating missing individuals, but they have a critical limitation: they are only issued for children age 17 and under. Just last year, thousands of adults went missing or were endangered and fell outside of the criteria to issue an AMBER Alert.

Today’s Order closes this critical gap in our public safety infrastructure. By establishing a dedicated Missing and Endangered Persons event code, this Order will assist law enforcement in disseminating critical information to the public to aid in the safe recovery of missing or endangered persons. This three-letter ‘MEP’ event code harmonizes emergency alerts nationwide to ensure that the public is alerted and prepared to respond during these emergencies. Put simply, this Order will help save lives.

While today’s action is sure to benefit communities across the country, it will have a profound impact on Tribal communities whose members face a disproportionate risk of violence, murder, or vanishing. I heard firsthand about the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons during my visit to the community of Bethel, Alaska. In this remote community of 6,000, without major roads and reachable only by boat or by plane, I spoke with and heard from residents about the lack of communications services and the challenges of locating and safely recovering missing members of their community.

Notably, earlier this year, the people of Bethel held their third annual Missing and Murdered Indigenous People March for Justice during the National Week of Action. All across the country, communities like Bethel are doing their part to raise awareness and end this crisis of violence. But they can’t do it alone. This Order strengthens our commitment to empowering Tribes to address this crisis by providing critical tools to locate and recover missing and endangered persons.

I want to recognize Native Public Media for their tremendous work and advocacy on this important issue, which spurred this Order. I look forward to their continued engagement. Thank you to the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau and the Office of Native Affairs and Policy for their good work on this item. It has my full support.