

- SUBJECT:** Expediting missing-person investigations for persons with chronic dementia
- COMMITTEE:** Public Safety — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 6 ayes — B. Turner, Carter, Gutierrez, Hupp, P. King, Najera  
0 nays  
3 absent — Keel, Berman, Driver
- WITNESSES:** For — David Justice; Amy Matta and Frances Plotsky, Alzheimer’s Association, Greater Austin Chapter  
Against — None  
On — Heidi Fischer, Texas Department of Public Safety
- BACKGROUND:** Chapter 62 of the Code of Criminal Procedure requires that an investigation into the whereabouts of a child reported missing begin immediately if the child is suspected of being in danger. The law requires that all other missing-person investigations begin “with due diligence.” Law enforcement agencies typically wait 24 hours before starting a missing-person investigation that does not involve a child in danger.
- DIGEST:** CSHB 605 would require law enforcement agencies to initiate a missing-person investigation immediately if the missing person suffered from chronic dementia, including Alzheimer’s Disease. It would require the law enforcement agency to enter a missing person’s name immediately into the National Crime Information Center’s missing-person file and, if applicable, into the Alzheimer’s Association Safe Return database.
- The bill also would amend the Penal Code to make knowingly filing a false missing-person report a Class C misdemeanor, subject to a maximum penalty of a \$500 fine. The bill also would make nonsubstantive and conforming language changes.
- CSHB 605 would take effect September 1, 1999.

**SUPPORTERS  
SAY:**

By expediting missing-person investigations for persons with dementia who wander, CSHB 605 would protect more of these Texans from possible harm and ensure a higher survival rate from these incidents.

Approximately 265,000 Texans suffer from some sort of chronic dementia or Alzheimer's Disease, a common symptom of which is the tendency to wander. People with dementia often become disoriented and cannot find their way home, even in familiar surroundings. In these circumstances, they become easy targets for theft or for sexual or physical abuse.

Persons with dementia who wander have a 100 percent survival rate if they are found within 24 hours. That survival rate drops almost by half if the search takes more than 24 hours. These missing persons commonly die of hypothermia or dehydration if not found within a day.

Initiating a search earlier would reduce the distance that a person could travel before being found and would minimize potential health-care costs.

Expediting missing-person searches for persons with dementia would not place a significantly greater burden on law enforcement. Actually, starting the search earlier would reduce the distance that wandering persons might cover, which would likely reduce the time and effort needed to locate them.

**OPPONENTS  
SAY:**

No apparent opposition.

**NOTES:**

The original bill would have required that an investigation begin immediately if the missing person suffered from Alzheimer's Disease. The committee substituted the term "chronic dementia," which includes Alzheimer's Disease. The committee substitute also added the requirement that a missing person's name be entered into the Alzheimer's Association Safe Return database, if applicable, and added the penalty for filing a false report.