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## **VIRGINIA STATE POLICE OBSERVE AMBER ALERT AWARENESS DAY Kicks Off National Poster Contest for 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Students Statewide**

RICHMOND – The Virginia State Police will join law enforcement nationwide in recognizing Jan. 13, 2009, as AMBER Alert Awareness Day. Tuesday marks the 13th anniversary of the abduction and murder of Amber Hagerman of Arlington, Texas. The nine-year-old's tragic death in 1996 prompted broadcasters in her state to team with local law enforcement agencies to develop an early warning system which solicits the public's help to find abducted children. The AMBER (America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response) Alert program is now available in all 50 states, creating a national network to aid in the recovery of abducted children.

Nationwide more than 430 children have been safely returned to their families thanks to the AMBER Alert program, according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). In Virginia, there have been 25 AMBER Alert activations since its inception in 2002, with two activations in 2008.

"AMBER Alert Awareness Day gives all of us an opportunity to renew our efforts to make child safety a priority." Colonel W. Steven Flaherty, Virginia State Police Superintendent, said. "I urge all citizens of Virginia to make special recognition of this anniversary and encourage parents, guardians and teachers to educate children regarding their personal safety."

As part of Amber Alert Awareness Day, Virginia State Police have partnered with the Department of Education, the Virginia Council for Private Education, as well as the Organization of Virginia Homeschoolers to coordinate the participation of Virginia's 5th grade students in the National Missing Children's Day Poster Contest sponsored by the United States Department of Justice. The contest aims to educate children about personal safety through creative artwork representing America's effort to "Bring Our Missing Children Home," which is this year's theme. Virginia school divisions have been sent information and are scheduled to kickoff the art project on AMBER Alert Day (Jan. 13). Each school division will select one winner and submit their poster to the Virginia State Police Missing Children Clearinghouse by March 6, 2009. Judging for the statewide winner will take place the week of March 9, 2009.

In April, the national judges will submit the name of the poster contest winner. The winning student will travel to Washington, DC accompanied by his/her parents and be recognized at the National Missing Children's Day ceremony on May 25, 2009. The winning poster will be used the following year as the pictorial theme for the 2010 National Missing Children's Day.

For additional information about the National Missing Children's Day Poster Contest, visit the following Web sites:

<http://www.vsp.state.va.us/MissingChildrenPosterContest.shtm>

<http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/programs/postercontest/>

Note to media: For interviews, please contact Lieutenant Pete Fagan at 804-674-2023

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