

northwest

Dalton's Law

Life-saving legislation born of tragedy

by Malka Geffen

The Oregon House of Representatives unanimously passed House Bill 3176, also known as Dalton's Law, May 8. If passed by the Senate and signed by the governor, it would require that telematics service providers give vehicle location information to law enforcement when lives are in danger.

The legislation is named for Dalton Robertson, a 42-year-old gay man who went missing in his new Lincoln Aviator in September 2005. The bill's sponsor, state Rep. Donna Nelson, R-McMinnville, is mother to J Graigory, a friend of the late Robertson. According to Graigory, who is also gay, his friend was a highly regarded interior designer for the Hollywood elite. Graigory, a production coordinator, met Robertson five years ago in Los Angeles and considers him a close friend and mentor. "Dalton was a very funny guy and a big supporter of Aid for AIDS and other worthwhile nonprofit organizations," he said.

According to Graigory, Robertson was diagnosed with depression shortly before he disappeared. Fearing he was a danger to himself, Graigory said Robertson's roommates filed a missing person's report when Robertson did not show up for a weekend gathering in Palm Springs, Calif. His new car was equipped with a LoJack tracking system meant to lead police to the vehicle if it were stolen. This gave friends and family hope that law enforcement officials could locate Robertson;

however, the manufacturer, according to Graigory, refused to provide the car's location despite police requests and family pleas.

"His mother asked, his partner asked, the sheriff asked, and they said no—only the owner of the vehicle could get the information. They said, 'Find him and then he can call us and we'll find the vehicle.' Dalton was found on the fifth day and, based on the coroner's report, he died that morning," said Graigory.

Graigory said that Dalton's Law is about time. Similar to the golden hour after which the ability to save a person's life drops dramatically, there is a race against time when trying to locate a missing person.

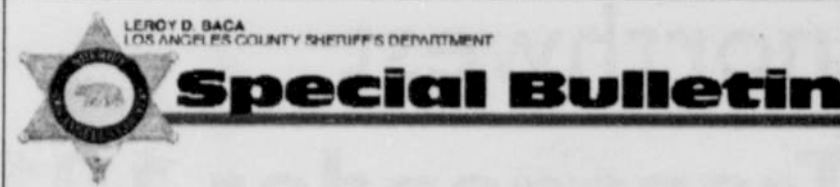
"We sat for five days knowing we could find him immediately. Everybody knew it, and that made us so angry and hurt...it was truly horrific," he said. "If this bill existed, we could have found out within an hour. But it's no longer about Dalton; it's about the next AMBER [America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response] Alert or person who's driven off a remote road like [James and Kati Kim] or a grandmother with Alzheimer's—their lives will be saved. When the first person's life is saved...it won't bring balance to this situation, it will just bring justice."

Opposition to this bill is framed in a concern for privacy rights. But Nelson's office worked to revise the bill with the American Civil Liberties Union, the

Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association and others to protect individual rights. The revised bill states that law enforcement may request vehicle location information from a telematics service provider once they have obtained a search warrant, have received consent from the vehicle's owner or have reasonable grounds to believe a life-threatening emergency exists. Among the many supporters of the bill are the Oregon State Police Officers Association and the Oregon State Sheriff's Association as well as John Walsh, host of the television program *America's Most Wanted*.

Graigory said it feels good to be working on the same side as his mother on legislation. "The last time I testified before the House Judiciary Committee, Mom and I were on opposite sides of Senate Bill 1000," said Graigory, who added that Nelson did not testify in 2005 but voted against the bill. "This time, we sat together at the table for the same cause—it was really moving. We may disagree on big issues, but saving lives is important to both of us."

Graigory said he is also glad Nelson pledged her support to Robertson's mother, Ann. "I am so proud to sponsor this bill in honor of my late friend



Special Bulletin

MISSING PERSON



ROBERTSON, DALTON LEE
MW/42 AKA "Lee"
5'11", 210 lbs., brown hair, brown eyes
clothing worn, unknown
Vehicle: 2005 Lincoln Aviator, silver,
license plates not attached to vehicle
FCN #2320526900098
NCIC #M135209005

Detectives from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department are seeking the public's assistance in locating the above missing person.

The missing person, Dalton Robertson, lives on North Huntley Drive, West Hollywood. He was last seen at 12:00 p.m., on Friday, September 23rd, 2005, leaving work, in the 8000 block of Santa Monica Boulevard, West Hollywood. He is driving the above described vehicle. He was recently diagnosed with depression.

Dalton Robertson disappeared in his new car equipped with an anti-theft vehicle locator device.

Dalton," said Nelson. "It may come too late for Dalton, but it could come just in time for an abducted child, a missing person or the victim of a carjacking."

According to Graigory, the issue missed the California Legislature's deadline, but he is looking to Oregon for the opportunity to start the ball rolling. "My hope is if the bill passes and is signed by the governor, it will lead to other states saying this is a common-sense law we need," he said.

Dalton's Law now moves on to the Oregon Senate for further consideration. Graigory encourages people to support the bill by contacting their legislators and e-mailing Nelson's office at rep.donnanelson@state.or.us. 10



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