Good morning Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Heidi Haley Franklin, and I am Vice President for Clinical Services at the Alzheimer’s Association. The Alzheimer’s Association is the world’s leading health organization in Alzheimer’s care, support and research.

I would like to express my strong support for HF 805 to create a working group to thoughtfully determine the need for a Silver Alert system in Minnesota.

Currently there are an estimated 100,000 Minnesotans living with Alzheimer’s disease and an additional 245,000 family caregivers who are providing care and support. With age being the greatest risk factor for Alzheimer’s, this number is set to skyrocket. Alzheimer’s is a public health crisis and the defining disease of the Baby Boom generation.

The reality is that six out of 10 individuals with Alzheimer’s or dementia will wander at some point in the disease process, and many will wander repeatedly. Caregivers expect symptoms of severe memory loss and confusion, but they are not typically prepared to be on a heightened state of alert to monitor the whereabouts of their family members with dementia.

These family caregivers never know when wandering will take place, however, they know it can be dangerous and often life threatening. If individuals with dementia are not found within 24 hours, up to fifty percent will suffer serious injury or death. In addition, a person with memory loss may not be able to provide his name or address to the person who finds him, and may not even appear to know that he is lost. Even if they are located; reuniting them with a family member presents challenges.

Wandering is a common symptom of dementia, and it poses a constant stress which weighs heavily on caregivers and all family members. These wandering incidents must be treated as an emergency and the response must begin immediately. As you can imagine, it can only take a moment for someone to walk away. This can be true in any setting- the home, the mall or in the grocery store. Although most individuals who wander can be located within 1.5 miles from home, living in greater Minnesota poses unique challenges. Social isolation and a vast geography contribute even more significant safety concerns. A person with dementia could wander a few miles on a road or through a field without seeing anyone to help them return home. Additionally, in more rural areas in Minnesota, technology such as GPS tracking systems do not always function properly, creating more of a challenge to keep rural Minnesotans with dementia safe.

Wandering is not limited to community settings. Wandering also occurs in assisted living facilities, nursing homes and memory care facilities, creating even greater urgency for immediate action to take place.

Age is the strongest factor in predicting Alzheimer’s disease with one in three individuals impacted with the disease by age 85. As the baby boomer population continues to age, the number of individuals with potential to wander will grow dramatically.

I urge the committee to move forward this important piece of legislation.

Thank you for your time today.