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SCHAKOWSKY'S SAFE CALL BILL INCLUDED IN BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION TO PROTECT CONSUMERS' PHONE RECORDS

BILL PASSES HOUSE ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE; WOULD MAKE IT ILLEGAL TO POSE AS OTHERS TO OBTAIN PRIVATE PHONE RECORDS

WASHINGTON, DC -- The SAFE CALL bill, sponsored by U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky, ranking member on the Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection, was today included in bipartisan legislation passed by the House Energy and Commerce Committee which would protect the private phone records of consumers. Schakowsky's SAFE CALL bill would make it illegal to pretext, or to pose as others in order to obtain their phone records.

The bipartisan legislation which today passed the Energy and Commerce Committee, the Prevention of Fraudulent Access to Phone Records Act, would address the concerns raised by the Chicago Police Department earlier this year about the threat pretexting posed to their undercover offices.

Schakowsky's Committee statement is below:

I am proud that my bill, the SAFE CALL Act, has become part of the bipartisan effort to combat one of the newest threats to consumers' privacy and safety - the fraudulent acquisition of phone records, or pretexting, in order to sell those records to anyone who wants them. I would like to thank you both, Chairman Barton and Ranking Member Dingell, as well as Chairmen Stearns and Deal and Ranking Member Markey for all the effort that went into the bill before us today.

The goal of creating strong and effective consumer protections united us, and I appreciate the hard work and courtesy shown at the drafting table.

As our Committee has discovered time and time again, the Internet is not only an incredible resource - expanding the possibilities for research, commerce, and connecting with family and friends - but it is also a fraudster's paradise. For about \$20 a year, scam artists can buy a website, set up shop, and start their racket. For pretexters, modern day pirates, the Internet is their Seven Seas and consumers' privacy is their booty.

Earlier this year, we learned that personal and business phone records can be accessed with just the click of the mouse by anyone who wants them. There are over 40 websites offering phone call logs - and it's only around \$100 for a month's worth of records.

There is a lot more than privacy at stake. Businesses can use ill-gotten phone records to spy on their competitors and steal contacts and clients. Stalkers can buy phone records to keep tabs on their victims. The Chicago Police Department recognized the dangers of pretexting and put out a warning to its undercover officers that drug dealers can use it to identify them. The FBI also issued a warning to its undercover agents. Personal and public safety should not be for sale.

There are questions of whether the purveyors of consumers' phone records are skirting current law to hock their wares. It is time for Congress to end all ambiguity in the law and make it clear that the pretexting for and the selling of phone records are illegal - period. It is also time for phone companies to do a better job of protecting their customers' call records in the first place.

The Prevention of Fraudulent Access to Phone Records Act would address both issues. It would expressly prohibit pretexting for phone records and require that phone companies establish better security practices to ensure they are not jeopardizing their customers in any way. It would also put the control of personal phone records back in consumers' hands, requiring them to "opt-in" - or expressly consent - before any phone record is shared. This bill would help restore consumers' rights to protect their personal information, and I look forward to voting for it.

Once, again, I have to recognize my state of Illinois for being the leader in the nation on bringing this issue to light. Frank Main at the Chicago Sun-Times first broke this story; Senator Durbin introduced the first bill in his chamber, the Phone Records Protection Act; and Illinois Attorney General, Lisa Madigan brought the first cases in the country against call brokers. I am glad we are raising this invasion of privacy to the national level by considering the bill before us today.