

WASHINGTON, DC (January 27, 2010) -- In the wake of the earthquake, Haitian-Americans went through card after card trying to reach loved ones in Haiti; often without connecting but still racking up huge bills. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-IL, sent letters to two major corporations that sell calling cards, urging them to change unfair billing practices. This week, STi; Inc. wrote back to Rep. Schakowsky expressing a desire to work with her office to rectify these problems.

The basic issue is that even in the best of times, calling cards often have bad, even predatory terms, that charge huge dialing fees, hang-up fees, "service" fees, and even charges when calls don't go through.

The letter Rep. Schakowsky penned, specifically asked the companies to, "Consider offering refunds to your customers who bought your cards and had their time run out before their call connected. I understand that you have distributed some free calling cards in Haitian neighborhoods in Florida, and applaud your actions, but I urge you to expand that effort to other Haitian American communities."

STi responded with a letter on January 22, 2010 that said they do not charge for unconnected calls, but conceded it may be a problem with the third-party carriers they contract with. They explained, the carrier tells the calling card that its connected and the customer is charged but they still might not get anyone on the phone. They offered to work with us to reach out to the Haitian community in Jan's district in Chicago, to help people who have had trouble with STi cards.

Rep. Schakowsky still feels more can be done to address the billing practices and is working to put the company in touch with some Haitian community leaders. If constituents have difficulty with phone cards that should contact Rep. Schakowsky's office in the district.

STi Response is Attached