

Statement of Senator Inouye at E911 hearing

October 16, 2001

Good morning. Today the Communications Subcommittee examines the important issue of enhanced, or “e ” 911 services in the wireless industry. In light of recent tragic events, issues of public safety are particularly on the minds of all americans, senators included. As such, today we examine the steps that can and must be

taken to maximize public safety in an increasingly wireless world.

When a citizen calls 911 from a wireline phone, the operator almost always knows the caller's address and the identity of the owner of that phone. This enables almost immediate dispatch of emergency aid, even when the caller is too injured or disoriented to provide his or her exact location. On a

wireless phone, however, the operator must rely almost entirely on the caller, who may not know where he or she is, or who may be incapacitated or unable to call for help. Let me not understate the significance of this distinction. People perish because of this disparity in 911 service.

Tragically, this problem will get worse before it gets better. Of the roughly 190

million calls made to 911 each year, over 50 million are made from wireless phones – calls in which the 911 operator has to rely on the caller in distress to identify the place to send help.

Nearly six years ago, the wireless and public safety industries, to their credit, agreed upon a plan to help provide location information to operators receiving 911 calls

from a wireless phone. The FCC took that plan and crafted a sensible timeline for compliance.

Specifically, by October 1 of this year, wireless carriers were required to update their networks to provide location information to 911 centers – or PSAPS – within 6 months of a PSAP request.

Moreover, carriers were required to begin

deployment of wireless phones that include handset location technology, to enable the identification of a caller's location utilizing global positioning technology. By December 31, 2005, 95 percent of subscriber handsets must include location technology.

The approach taken by the fcc was reasonable, balanced, and appropriately prioritized public safety, while granting

industry ample time to plan to meet the requirements that were imposed.

Today, however, I am dismayed to report that not a single major carrier has met the initial deadlines imposed by the fcc for service availability. Instead, they have sought waivers from these obligations. I appreciate that there are technological and financial hurdles accompanying the transition to

wireless e911, that equipment manufacturers bear some responsibility to make compliant phones, and that the public safety community must increase their readiness to receive wireless location information.

Granted this is a complex problem, but the wireless industry was not unaware of these facts when it proposed its plan in 1996.

Moreover, as we shall hear, both network and handset technologies are currently

available today.

If location technology companies can invest millions to promote wireless e911 and public safety, we should expect no less from our wireless carriers, particularly when these same companies recently engaged in speculative bids of \$17 billion in the c block spectrum auctions. In that same vein, when wireless companies argue that the lack of

available spectrum is a matter of national priority, they should also remember that public safety is a national priority too.

In particular, I am concerned by the E911 waivers recently granted by the fcc to five of the six major wireless carriers. My view of the FCC waiver process is simple. The waiver process should not be used to reward carrier inaction. The FCC should only grant

waivers where there are compelling reasons for doing so; where the compromise to public safety will be minimized; and where the carrier seeking the waiver has outlined a clear plan for implementation of E911 technology on a timetable as close as possible to the existing framework set forth by the FCC. Additionally, my message to wireless carriers is clear. I expect you to meet the milestones you set.

I look forward to the testimony of the witnesses and to making the promise of e911 technology a reality.