



NATIONAL NETWORK
TO END DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE

NNEDV

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Via Electronic Submission

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Commission's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in PS Docket No. 08-51, 911 Call-Forwarding Requirements for Non-Service-Initialized Phones

Dear Commissioners:

In response to the Commission's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in PS Docket No. 08-51, the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) urges the Commission to continue allowing the connection of 911 calls from non-service initialized (NSI) devices. The use of an NSI device is an essential life-line for many domestic violence victims. For many victims, an NSI device is often incorporated as an integral part of their safety planning and enables them to access 911 in the event of a potentially life-threatening situation.

NSI Devices Are a Life-Line for Domestic Violence Victims

Having access to a phone that can call 911 in the event of an emergency is critical for a domestic violence victim. In a recent survey conducted by NNEDV, 83 percent of victim service providers reported that they give cell phones to survivors for safety planning purposes. "The phones become part of the survivor's safety plan," reported an Idaho advocate. "Even when there isn't a service on the phone, they know that they can always get emergency assistance because they have the '911 cell phone'." Even when victim service providers do not give out cell phones as part of the safety planning discussion, they tell victims that any cell phone, even one without a service contract, will be able to call 911 if needed.

In many cases, abusers will destroy victim's phones, discontinue paying the phone bill or refuse to replenish minutes, or monitor their phones with spyware – monitoring software – in an effort to control and isolate the victim and prevent them from reaching out for help. NSI devices offer survivors another option. One Illinois advocate explained, "I give the phones out and suggest that they keep the phone as a backup plan in case the abuser takes their regular cell phone." Survivors can hide more than one NSI device from the abuser, and because it is an NSI device, they don't have to worry about paying a service contract. According to the survey, 45 percent of programs believe that victims are using the NSI phones for emergency purposes.

NSI Access to 911 Is Necessary, Despite Available Cheaper Devices, Services, and Programs

Although some programs also give out cell phones that have a limited minutes and service, they also give out NSI phones. According to the survey, 23 percent of programs give cell phones that have service (minutes and data) on it, while 60 percent of programs give out NSI devices. Phones with service are provided through the Verizon Hopeline program for free or through the Lifeline Assistance program for minimal costs.

Even if the phones do have minutes and data, it is often limited, and victims, particularly those with low income, will not be able to refill it until the next month or until they have the funds to replenish their minutes. Regardless, victims will still keep the phone and use it for emergency purposes even when they are out of minutes.

NNEDV Urges the FCC To Allow 911 Access from Non-Service Initialized Devices

For domestic violence victims, being able to call 911 can be the difference between life and death. Abusers will often take away victim's phones or monitor their phones to keep them isolated, alone, and vulnerable. An NSI phone is a significant way that they can reach out for help when they are no other options. A Washington advocate wrote, "We don't know if all the survivors use the NSI phones we give them. But we do know that the phones help them feel safe and secure, knowing that they can call 911 if needed and someone will respond."

NNEDV urges the FCC to find other solutions to address the concerns of fraudulent 911 calls from NSI devices but allow victims of domestic violence to be able to access 911 services. Even though the legitimate calls to 911 from NSI devices may be lower than the fraudulent calls, every single one of those legitimate calls meant that someone who was in danger got help. If victims are not able to connect with 911, it means that when their life is at risk, no one's coming.

NNEDV is a social change organization dedicated to creating a social, political, and economic environment in which violence against women no longer exists. Founded in 1990, NNEDV represents 56 state and territory domestic violence coalitions who in turn represent nearly 2,000 local domestic violence service providers across the country.

NNEDV's Safety Net Project addresses how technology impacts safety, privacy, accessibility, and the civil rights of victims. Since 2002, the Safety Net team has presented nearly 1,000 trainings to more than 71,000 people and responded to more than 13,500 unique requests for assistance and resources. Through in-depth consultations, the Project helps service providers on a range of issues, including complex technology-facilitated abuse and stalking cases, implementing technologies such as developing secure online chat systems, and developing best practices on how to use new technologies safely. The Safety Net Team also works closely with technology companies such as Verizon, Google, and Facebook and serves on Facebook's Safety Advisory Board.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

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