

Support HB 4006 – Cell Phones in Emergencies

Chairman, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, I would like to begin by thanking you for taking the time to listen to my testimony on this crucial bill that will save countless lives. My name is _____ and I am here representing the National Emergency Number Association (NENA), the only professional organization solely focused on 911 policy, technology, operations, and education issues. I have been a 911 dispatcher for over twenty years, and I have seen the devastating repercussions that occur when law enforcement officers cannot locate distressed individuals in a timely manner. That is why I am here to let you know that NENA is in full support of this bill requiring wireless providers to furnish location information on a wireless device to a law enforcement officer in emergency conditions.

As the bill analysis mentions, wireless carriers have the capabilities to determine the exact location of cell phones – capabilities that unfortunately far surpass that which most local and state law enforcement agencies are working with. When a call from a cell phone shows up in our system, the nearest location we are provided is that of the nearest cell phone tower from the signal. Clearly, knowing the general vicinity of an emergency situation is not very useful in densely populated areas or outside of wide-open fields with zero visual obstructions, such as buildings. In these situations, it would be greatly beneficial to law enforcement officers and emergency medical services to acquire the precise location of a cell phone call from wireless providers. Currently, these providers have no legal mandate to assist law enforcement in this way, and most do not in order to protect vital privacy rights of their clients and defend themselves against liability. While we agree that these privacy rights are paramount, certain concessions must be made in order to protect human life and public safety. In these emergency situations, every second and minute is the difference between life and death. This bill ensures that the most is made of these valuable seconds and maximizes the ability to protect our communities.

Almost a third of the nation has enacted laws similar to the one presently under consideration, and Michigan would do well to add its name to that list. We at NENA strongly believe that the protections against misuse of the actions warranted through this bill further strengthen the advantages of this lifesaving precaution. This bill rightfully criminalizes the abuse of authority provided by the new policy and protects wireless carriers in complying with this new mandate. Further, the laws of evidence in criminal procedure already prevent the introduction of improperly attained evidence and information of a crime from being used in court – together, these ensure citizens’ rights are not infringed upon and wireless providers will readily comply with the law. Wireless carriers already have access to the location information of those in emergency situations, and this bill will ensure that those who are equipped to resolve these situations are provided with such vital, life-saving information. It simply is not right for wireless carriers to sit on this data – as members of our community, they should be willing and able to assist law enforcement efforts.

In short, this bill will save lives, protect the public from any potential abuse of authority, and safeguard wireless carriers from liability when conforming to necessary legislation. We must do everything we can to make sure Michigan residents are safe and have a local law enforcement that can respond quickly to save those who are in need of protection. On behalf of NENA, I strongly encourage you to do the right thing and bring this bill into law. I appreciate your time in this matter, and I trust you all will make the best decision for the people of this state. Thank you.