

**Testimony of Steve Largent, President and CEO,
CTIA – The Wireless Association®
before the
House Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection and
Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet**

November 4, 2009

Chairman Rush and Chairman Boucher, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of CTIA – The Wireless Association® and the wireless industry.

I want to thank the Committee for convening today's hearing on distracted driving. CTIA and its member companies have long recognized the need to educate wireless consumers about safe driving and responsible wireless use. The safety of our consumers and others on the road is very important to us.

Both because of the Committee's work on telecommunications policy matters and as a result of your individual experiences as consumers, each of you have witnessed the impressive growth in the use of wireless services over the past decade. Wireless devices allow consumers to stay in touch with family and friends, work on the go, and receive news and information anytime, just about anywhere. A wireless device is also one of the best safety tools for consumers in emergency situations. In fact, wireless subscribers make more than 290,000 calls to 911 and other emergency services daily.

While the industry recognizes the importance of wireless devices for public convenience and safety, CTIA and its member companies also recognize that drivers are faced with numerous potential distractions when they are on the road. Some of

these distractions may be caused by drivers' inappropriate use of wireless devices. CTIA considers actions that require drivers to take their hands off the wheel and their eyes off the road for extended periods of time to be incompatible with safe driving.

The solution to the problem of distracted driving starts with enhanced personal responsibility and the acceptance that the primary obligation of every driver is safety. But that does not mean there aren't steps government and industry can take to help modify and alleviate behavior that contributes to distracted driving. There are, and we urge a combination of legislative, technological, and educational efforts that together can combine to combat distracted driving and make consumers fully aware that their first responsibility behind the wheel is to drive safely.

Starting on the legislative front, we support passage of legislation that would prohibit manual text and email messaging by all drivers. CTIA has been working collaboratively in this endeavor with the National Conference of State Legislatures and other state organizations; through these efforts, we hope to encourage the adoption of consistent state legislation addressing this problem.

In addition, CTIA and its member companies have urged state lawmakers to pass legislation that would help younger and less-experienced drivers fully direct their attention on the task of driving. The wireless industry supports prohibiting provisional or novice drivers from using wireless devices while driving, except in emergency cases. This type of safety measure is consistent with other graduated licensing measures, such as passenger limits and time-of-day restrictions, which allow less experienced drivers the opportunity to more fully develop their driving skills and judgment. These conditions provide inexperienced drivers with the opportunity to

acquire much-needed driving experience in a lower-risk environment than they might otherwise provide for themselves. Such safety measures are a constructive means of allowing younger drivers the ability to acquire the necessary experience to ultimately become more skilled and responsible drivers.

While CTIA supports efforts to respond to the distracted driving problem by enacting new laws, we also agree with Transportation Secretary LaHood's observation that a narrow legal response, by itself, probably will not be sufficient to alleviate the problem of distracted driving. For that reason, the wireless industry is not focused exclusively on legislation as we seek to promote driving safety.

On the technology front, there are a number of developments that may contribute to safer driving. Changes in the way roads are built, cars are designed, and, of course, in wireless technology can each help to improve driver safety. In the wireless industry, service providers, handset manufacturers, and applications developers all are engaged in efforts to enhance the consumer's wireless experience, including by developing technologies that will promote safer driving.

While the industry is hopeful that technological innovation can contribute to safer driving, not all technological solutions are equal, and I ask you to consider several key points about the role technology can play in reducing distracted driving. First, technological solutions should not be based on technology mandates, which can freeze or inhibit innovation. Second, technological solutions should fit within the existing legal and regulatory framework that governs the industry. And third, we must recognize that the key to any successful technological approach will be its consumer-friendliness. Carriers and manufacturers can engineer all sorts of amazing

capabilities into their products, but if consumers fail to adopt or enable those capabilities, the effort and money that goes into developing them will be for naught.

The last piece of CTIA's prescription for safer driving is continued education, which we think is vital for any effort to reduce distracted driving to be successful. The wireless industry has a long record of working to educate drivers about responsible driving behavior. In 2000, CTIA and its member companies distributed nationally a series of radio and television segments that reminded viewers of sensible safety measures and directed those viewers to a dedicated online resource that presented a wide range of safety tips on the subject. CTIA also designed and printed collateral materials incorporating the industry's safe driving tips. We continue to distribute those materials to appropriate audiences and these safety tips are still posted online.

That original campaign was updated in 2004 and 2007. As part of the 2007 updates, we produced ten public service radio announcements featuring 'real-life' scenarios where responsible behavior and sound judgment were exhibited by the driver. In addition to distributing these PSAs nationally, CTIA offered state highway safety agencies affiliated with the Governors Highway Safety Association the opportunity to co-brand the segments and have them redistributed in the agency's area, at no charge. Safety representatives in twelve states took advantage of CTIA's offer, and the PSAs were re-recorded with the appropriate agency's tags and delivered to radio outlets in its respective state.

In the most recent extension of our longstanding commitment to education and outreach efforts, CTIA recently partnered with the National Safety Council to

create a national campaign targeting parents and teenagers to raise awareness about the dangers of distracted driving. This partnership, which was months in the making, is a collaborative effort to further both organizations' mutual goal of promoting safe driving. We officially launched the "On the Road, Off the Phone" campaign last month, when CTIA and NSC unveiled a hard-hitting television commercial that we are distributing nationally and which can be viewed on a website we created to provide parents with tips on how to talk to their teens about safe driving.¹

This new campaign is geared at not only making teens aware that their actions behind the wheel have consequences, but also at reaching parents and identifying some real life situations their teens might encounter when driving. Both CTIA and the National Safety Council recognize the need to target both groups to ensure that this important message reaches them.

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Whether it is texting or emailing, reaching for a GPS device or MP3 player, being drowsy, or eating a snack on the road, drivers face many distractions. The wireless industry remains committed to working with the various stakeholders on the distracted driving issue. We take seriously the safety of our consumers and others on the road and will continue our multifaceted approach on the distracted driving issue by advocating for laws to prohibit texting and emailing while driving and restrictions on youth drivers. This issue also will require ongoing educational efforts to change the driving public's behavior, and we are committed to raising public awareness

¹ The commercial is available at <http://onroadoffphone.org>. A screen-shot from the website is attached at the end of this presentation.

about safe driving through the media and capitalizing on partnering opportunities where appropriate.

In closing, I want to again thank the Committee for its focus on this matter. This is a challenge we can solve together, and the wireless industry looks forward to working with all of you to get the message out that the number one priority for all drivers is safety.

