

For Immediate Release

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GROUPS BATTLE CELL PHONE INDUSTRY FOR CONSUMER PROTECTION LAW

*Seniors, Low-Income, Consumers, and Women's Campus Safety
Advocates Press for Nation's Strongest Cell Phone Law*

ALBANY, New York – The fight for the Cell Phone Consumer Protection Act heated up today as several groups, including AARP, joined forces for a press conference to urge the legislature not to bend to industry opposition and pass the legislation this year.

The Act would establish the strongest set of cell phone consumer protections in the nation – requiring disclosure of all hidden fees and allowing people to cancel their contracts after they receive their first bill without penalty. The cell phone industry is heavily opposed to the legislation.

“The cell phone industry has now out-ranked used car dealers as the most complained about industry in the nation – we think consumers deserve and need better protections,” said Lois Aronstein, AARP New York State Director. “With older New Yorkers mostly getting cell phones for use in an emergency, AARP strongly believes this legislation is a step in the right direction.”

AARP members from across the state were joined by representatives from the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), Public Utility Law Project (PULP), and representatives advocating for safer college campuses for women. Assemblywoman Audrey Pheffer, chair of the Consumer Affairs and Protection Committee, and Assemblyman Daniel O'Donnell, sponsor of the Assembly legislation, lent a powerful voice to the need for stronger consumer protections for New Yorkers using cell phones.

“As chair of the Consumer Affairs and Protection Committee I recognize that many consumers have concerns with their wireless service. The committee has been working diligently this session with consumer advocates, as well as the wireless industry, to better understand the issues at hand and to find possible legislative solutions to these concerns brought forth by consumers,” said Assemblywoman Audrey I. Pheffer.

“The need for consumer protection in this unregulated industry is critical. Cell phone users should know their rights as a consumer will be enforced under this legislation,” said Assemblyman Daniel O'Donnell, sponsor of the Cell Phone Consumer Protection Act.

The Cell Phone Consumer Protection Act (A.8539) would require cell phone companies to disclose fees, surcharges and taxes to consumers; allow consumers to cancel their contracts fifteen days after receiving the first bill without penalty; require cell phone companies to provide more detailed coverage maps of where the phones will work; and disclose to customers the cell phone's E-911 capabilities.

“Hidden fees and bad coverage have brought consumers to a boiling point, especially after they are roped into long service contracts,” added Aronstein. “We can’t understand why the cell phone industry stands in the way of a law that will help its customers.”

The Better Business Bureau reported that more complaints were made about cell phones than any other business in 2004 and 2005. According to the New York State Consumer Protection Board, cell phones are the second most complained about industry in the state.

Similar cell phone consumer protection legislation has been introduced in the New York State Senate (S.4263) by Senator James Wright, chair of the Energy and Telecommunications Committee. AARP also strongly supports this legislation.

AARP has over 2.6 million members in New York State. AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that helps people 50+ have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole. We produce *AARP The Magazine*, published bimonthly; *AARP Bulletin*, our monthly newspaper; *AARP Segunda Juventud*, our bimonthly magazine in Spanish and English; *NRTA Live & Learn*, our quarterly newsletter for 50+ educators; and our website, AARP.org. AARP Foundation is an affiliated charity that provides security, protection, and empowerment to older persons in need with support from thousands of volunteers, donors, and sponsors. We have staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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