Senators Introduce Anti-Theft Cell Phone “Kill Switch” Bill

Ben Munson

A group of Democratic senators have introduced a bill that would require all phones sold in the U.S. to have a “kill switch” theft deterrent device installed.

The bill requires devices to have free technology that would “allow the consumer to wipe their personal data off the phone, render the phone permanently inoperable to anyone but the owner, and prevent it from being reactivated on a network by anyone but the owner,” according to a press release on Senator Amy Klobuchar’s website [1].

The FCC has estimated that one in three U.S. robberies involve phone theft.

U.S. Senators Klobuchar (D-MN), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), and Mazie Hirono (D-HI) are calling their legislation The Smartphone Theft Deterrent Act. The group said the measure has the support of groups like the Major Cities Chiefs Association and the Secure Our Smartphones Initiative including founders New York State Attorney General Eric Schneiderman and San Francisco District Attorney George Gascón.

Last week, Democratic State Senator Mark Leno has proposed a bill that would require all smartphones and tablets sold in California to feature a kill switch [2]. That proposed bill would go into effect by Jan. 1, 2015 and require manufacturers to include the function on all devices or face fines of up to $2,500 for each device sold without a kill switch.

Wireless industry trade group CTIA, on behalf of major U.S. carriers, has been an opponent of any “kill switch” measure [3] and has been working on alternatives like integrated databases to prevent stolen devices from being activated on other carrier networks.

"While Senator Klobuchar and CTIA are of like mind when it comes to wanting to prevent the theft of wireless devices, we clearly disagree on how to accomplish that goal,” Jot Carpenter, CTIA vice president of government affairs, said in a statement.

Instead of technology mandates, CTIA said a better approach would be to enact Senator Schumer's legislation to criminalize tampering with mobile device identifiers.

“This would build on the industry's efforts to create the stolen device databases, give law enforcement another tool to combat criminal behavior, and leave carriers, manufacturers, and software developers free to create new, innovative loss and theft prevention tools for consumers who want them,” Carpenter said in the

statement.

CTIA last year outlined in an FCC filing the potential threats presented by requiring a smartphone kill switch. CTIA noted that once the kill switch is used, the action cannot be undone and the device cannot be reused, and that a kill switch could be a target for hackers.

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http://www.wirelessweek.com/news/2014/02/senators-introduce-anti-theft-cell-phone-%E2%80%9Ckill-switch%E2%80%9D-bill

Links:
[1] http://www.klobuchar.senate.gov/public/news-releases?ID=886c10a9-51e0-4f0a-b5cf-2e272c940db7
[2] http://www.wirelessweek.com/news/2014/02/california-bill-proposes-mandatory-cell-phone-kill-switches
[3] http://www.wirelessweek.com/news/2013/11/t-verizon-sprint-t-mobile-all-reject-smartphone-kill-switch