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## **Consumer, Civil Rights, Business Organizations Form Coalition to Fight Cook County Phone Tax**

*Group urges Cook County residents to contact commissioners to  
stop unfair tax*

CHICAGO—More than 80 consumer, civil rights and business organizations stood together in opposition of the proposed Cook County phone tax today. They urged county commissioners to reject the plan to add \$4 per month to each phone line and cell phone in Cook County.

“The proposed Cook County telecom tax will cost the average consumer roughly \$240 a year—a huge bite out of family budgets that are already stretched by rising energy bills and record prices at the pump,” said David Kolata, executive director of the Citizens Utility Board. “The opposition to this burdensome tax has been loud and clear, and we urge the county board to listen.”

Currently, about 25 percent of an average family’s monthly phone bill in Cook County already goes toward taxes and fees. If the proposed tax is implemented, that amount will skyrocket to 40 percent for most families, which is estimated to be the largest percentage nationally.

Tennie Bryant, a member of ACORN, said, “The proposed phone tax would cost my household \$20 per month with a \$4 tax on each of our lines – home phone, fax, and three cell phones. We simply cannot afford this new tax. If we are forced to pay it, we will not be able to pay for something else that is essential – like food, medicine, or heat.”

The proposed tax will increase each year with inflation, which translates to a total of \$1,260 over five years for a typical family with five phones.

Members of the coalition urged all Cook County residents to call **1-800-791-6540** or visit **[www.NoPhoneTax.org](http://www.NoPhoneTax.org)** and let their commissioners know they must stop this highly regressive tax. Coalition participants have been mobilizing their members to reach out to the commissioners and President Stroger urging them to vote “no” on the proposal. More than 100,000 emails have been sent to commissioners from the coalition Web site.

"Phone service is not a luxury - it is a necessity. Older people, who already spend a higher percentage of their incomes on their utility bills than other age groups, will be hit hard by a hike in the Cook County phone tax," said George O'Hare, Executive Council Member for AARP Illinois. "This phone tax is a wrong number - AARP urges Cook County Commissioners to do the right thing and say no to this unfair tax."

According to a recent study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project, African-Americans are adopting high speed Internet at much higher rates than they previously did. In 2005, only 14 of African-Americans had a high speed Internet connection; as of July 2007, that rate jumped to 40 percent. This phone tax would stop this tremendous progress.

Rev. James L. Demus III, founder and co-director of the Ministerial Alliance Against the Digital Divide, said, "More and more people finally have access to the Internet and technology that allows them to fully participate, both on the job and at home, in our high-tech world. But this outrageous and highly regressive tax will result in low-income and minority communities once again falling through the digital divide, creating a stronger division between those who have access to technology and those who do not."

In this global economy, companies, both large and small, have choices of where they want to locate. This is an anti-business, job-killing tax that will send companies fleeing to other counties, states and countries.

Omar Duque, President and CEO of the Illinois Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, said, "Cook County businesses would be hit hard by the proposed phone tax. In today's competitive climate, business must stay connected to their employees and customers at all times. Phones, faxes and Internet access are essential business tools, and this tax could cost even small firms thousands of dollars each year in new fees."

The Coalition is made up of more than 80 consumer, civil rights and business organizations that are opposed to the proposed phone tax.

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