

Senate holds hearing on cell phone jamming technology

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Today, the US Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Technology held a hearing titled "Contraband Cell Phones in Correctional Facilities: Public Safety Impact and the Potential Implications of Jamming." The hearing was organized to discuss matters surrounding the Federal Communications Commission's ban on cell phone jamming, and to also discuss Senate Bill S251, the Safe Prisons Communications Act of 2009. S251 aims at amending the Communications Act of 1934 to permit targeted interference with mobile radio services within prison facilities. Speakers included Steve Largent, President and CEO of CTIA; Gary Maynard, Secretary for the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services; Richard Mirgon, Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO); John Whitmire, Texas State Senator; and Inspector General John Moriarty, Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

Most of the discussion centered on the use of cell phone jamming technology and whether it is an effective way of curbing inmate cell phone usage. The panel was split on whether or not this is a necessary tool for correctional agencies. Richard Mirgon of APCO stated that APCO is against this type of technology because of the risk it poses to public safety officials and first responders. Mirgon felt that jamming all cell phone usage in and around a jail limits the ability for public safety officials, specifically prison officials, from communicating with one another during a crisis. Mirgon felt that inmates will find a way around the system, no matter what is in place. He stated that APCO supports cell phone detection technology and phone-sniffing dogs. Others, such as John Moriarty, support S251 and would like to see measures taken to jam cell phone usage. The argument made is that agencies need to fight technology with technology.

Currently, a few states have tested and researched [cell phone detection equipment](#), which has been estimated at \$500,000 per prison (Texas), which includes equipment and personnel. It is currently unknown as to how much cell phone jamming technology would cost because it currently is illegal. It is not unreasonable to estimate that it would cost the state roughly the same amount of money as cell phone detection equipment costs.

This is definitely a topic which most, if not all wireless providers will keep an eye on. If ruled legal, this technology could have detrimental effects on wireless coverage. At the same time, it opens the door to a variety of different vendors who have the capabilities to implement this type of technology. In the long run, cell phone jamming could be a multi-billion dollar industry due to the number of prisons across the country. It also has the potential to spread across market lines and possibly be implemented in schools. Interested vendors should keep a close eye on S251 to see if cell phone jamming becomes a reality.