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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**PRETEXTING: STEALING IDENTITIES AND JEOPARDIZING
PERSONAL SAFETY**

***Illegal sales of cell phone and other personal records compromises safety of
victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking***

(FEBRUARY 8, 2006) WASHINGTON, DC – Cell phones can be a lifeline for battered women and victims of sexual assault and stalking. But when cell phone and other personal records are stolen and sold for commercial gain, those lifelines can be used to track and terrorize victims. The issue of “pretexting”, the practice of obtaining personal records under false pretenses, has gained national attention over the past few weeks as reports surfaced of stolen cell phone records being sold over the Internet. Today, the Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs, Product Safety and Insurance held a hearing to discuss our nation’s response to better safeguarding consumer phone records. Cindy Southworth, Director of Technology and founder of the Safety Net Project at the National Network to End Domestic Violence, testified at the hearing that pretexting poses a deadly risk for survivors of violence.

“The theft of personal information is not only a violation of privacy, it is a crime. This breach of security is devastating for the average individual who may have his or her identity stolen and credit destroyed,” said Southworth. “But for a victim of domestic violence or stalking, this theft is not just financially or personally devastating – it can be fatal.”

Cell phone records are rich with information about the cell phone’s owner – identifying who the owner calls and where those calls are made from. By purchasing a cell phone record from an information broker who has used pretexting strategies to obtain the information, a perpetrator can determine if a victim is contacting a local domestic violence program for help or where she may flee, making it impossible for her to seek safety.

A quick search of the Internet reveals hundreds of these information brokers that regularly steal and sell consumer information, including phone records, the address associated with a P.O. Box, social security numbers and unlisted phone numbers. Illegal access to these and other consumer records pose a great danger to survivors of violence and the public at large. Southworth urged the subcommittee to develop a comprehensive approach to safeguarding all consumer records.

“Because pretexting phone records is just one small piece of the larger problem of stealing, mining, and selling personal information. A multi-faceted approach would offer the best protection to all consumers. State and federal agencies are encouraged to use all existing and emerging laws to hold individuals and organizations accountable for committing fraud and other crimes,” said Southworth. “NNEDV applauds Congress for addressing the wide-spread problem of pretexting and selling of stolen personal data.”

Safety Net: the National Safe and Strategic Technology Project is a program by the National Network to End Domestic Violence Fund (NNEDV Fund) to educate victims of sexual and domestic violence, their advocates, law enforcement and the public on strategically using wireless and other modern technologies to increase personal safety and privacy. Safety Net launched in 2002 as the only national program focusing on the intersection of technology and domestic violence. Safety Net has trained more than 14,000 advocates, law enforcement officials and prosecutors on how technology can be used to increase the safety and confidentiality of victims of domestic violence. Safety Net also tracks emerging technology issues and their impact on victim safety, working with local, state and federal agencies to amend or create policies that enhance victim safety and confidentiality.

National Network to End Domestic Violence Fund

The National Network to End Domestic Violence Fund (NNEDV Fund) is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to providing public education, training, and technical assistance to maintain and develop the professional expertise of advocates working to end domestic violence. The NNEDV Fund strives to strengthen advocates as organizers and activists in the tradition of social change movements. For more information, please visit www.nnedvfund.org.

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