

**Comments of Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate**

**CTIA Fall Show**  
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**(As Prepared)**

Thanks to CTIA for hosting another spectacular show, and for arranging such an important and timely panel. As most of you know, I – along with my friend Jim Steyer of Common Sense Media – spend a lot of time and effort trying to promote child online safety across the country and now even globally. I would like to extend my appreciation to Steve Largent for endorsing the need to highlight this issue on the conference agenda and to provide this opportunity for dialogue as your industry truly becomes the 3<sup>rd</sup> pipe for many consumers and increasingly our youth to go online. The wireless industry has over 16 million teenage customers, tweens (9-12) generate over \$300 million a month in revenue for your industry, and marketing to preschoolers is a reality. Therefore, you as wireless- and now increasingly internet- providers must be part of this important dialogue about our children's health and safety.

Those of you who know me, know this is an extremely important issue to me not just as a Commissioner or policy maker, but also as a mom. Our children are indeed our country's most valuable natural resource, and we should treat them as such. In order to ensure they reach their greatest potential, we must ensure that they have access to a wealth of educational information in an environment that protects their physical safety, their healthy mental development, and their emotional well-being.

## Parental Responsibility

First, I believe parents have a responsibility to parent. Parents are the first line of defense for their families. However, parents cannot do it alone in this world of pervasive communications and constant bombardment of messages. What was once described as a “virtual world” is now our children’s real world – 24/7. The average teenager spends 16 hours per week online – that’s in addition to hours spent watching TV. A 2007 Pew study shows that 28% of teens have created their own blog. Having a blog can be terrific – for organizing volunteer activities, discussing homework, building community, creating content – all part of the incredible opportunities technology is providing our children. Twenty-seven percent maintain their own webpage. Thirty-nine percent share their own artwork, photos, stories or videos online. Forty-one percent of teens who use MySpace, Facebook, or other social networking sites, send messages to their friends everyday through these sites. Because the Internet is an endless highway of highly personal, even intimate information and entertainment, those who provide an onramp to this highway – such as Internet service providers – have an obligation to educate all users—but especially children regarding the dangers it poses and the tools to protect themselves.

Wireline providers of Internet service – the cable companies and local telephone companies – already have assumed this responsibility in crucial ways. So while I am challenging your industry, in the words of Alex Haley, “Find good and praise it.” I am pleased that the wireless industry is now joining this effort. Just last month, Sprint announced that its Internet safety program, 4Net Safety, will partner with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children’s website to inform kids about social

networking, cyberbullying, and online gaming. More recently, CTIA and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) have been engaged in a productive dialogue to provide online child protection in the wireless world. Talking is a great start, but we need real work to be done, and I challenge every member of CTIA to support this effort wholeheartedly.

Why is participation by the wireless industry so important? Because one in six American households has only a wireless phone – that’s up from 1 in 8 in 2006, and 1 in 18 in 2004. Because wireless is the fastest-growing source of access to broadband in the U.S., with the number of wireless broadband connections tripling from 11 million in mid-2006 to 35 million in mid-2007. Because 60% of our teenagers have cell phones – with more and more of those phones including Internet access; and cell phones are being marketed to kindergartners. If parents thought it was hard to monitor what their children were doing on the computer in their living room, imagine how difficult it will be given the PC is in the palm of their child’s hand. Just as we all wanted to protect them from strangers on the walk home from school, with a mobile broadband phone, the Internet’s treacherous back alleys are only a text away.

Governments in other countries have already recognized the risks and are taking active steps to protect their children. Japanese officials are urging cell phone manufacturers to offer phones that have GPS and talk capabilities only. I challenge American wireless manufacturers to do the same. The United Kingdom’s Office of Communications (Ofcom) recently recommended to the Mobile Broadband Group, a

consortium of the 6 largest U.K. mobile operators, that they strengthen regulations designed to prevent minors from accessing adult content online. Ofcom also recommended a voluntary opt-in system that would allow children to access only child-friendly content. While there are certainly great benefits to be gleaned from Internet connections over mobile devices – for example, The Weather Channel now offers live weather video to cell phones, keeping Americans safe wherever they travel and other innovators here at the CTIA Show – we must remain cognizant of the serious risks to our children *and steps the industry can take to protect them.*

Finally, since this show attracts international providers, it is important that we recognize that Internet safety isn't just a concern for America's families – it's a growing global concern as well. During the past year, I have participated in dialogues with my colleagues at the West Africa ICT Conference in Ghana, at APEC-Tel, the Asian Pacific Telecom Ministers in Bangkok, at the Global Forum in Italy, and with Secretary General Hammadoun Tourre of the ITU who has announced a cybersecurity initiative for member nations. From the First Lady of Egypt to Ministers of Japan, Australia, and Viet Nam various initiatives are being undertaken. DOCOMO, the largest Japanese wireless provider, has undertaken a national Internet-safety curriculum, providing both curriculum and instructors in schools. In 2008, DOCOMO plans to teach 5,000 classes across Japan.

Our world has gone wireless! And many of those responsible for this exciting development are right here at the CTIA show. Your endeavors are helping ensure that Americans are informed, entertained, and most importantly, safe. Our children are now

able to broaden their educational, social, and geographic horizons beyond our wildest dreams. In many U.S. schools today, the ratio of computers to students is one to one. Web-based education software now links students, teachers, and parents. The U.S. Department of Education is partnering with companies like Apple, Cisco, Dell, and Microsoft to assess ways we can prepare America's children for the global and highly competitive environment they will face as they seek the jobs of tomorrow. The same trend is occurring abroad as well. Five years ago, in Birmingham, England, the government gave computers to students in two high-crime neighborhoods. Today, those schools are among the top in the U.K. in annual improvements in reading and math.

From the wonders of telemedicine, to distance learning opportunities; from video content production to enabling home-based business and tele-work, the Internet and broadband have brought a world of services and opportunities to families and children. You have put them in the palm of our hands. I thank you and challenge you—as individual companies and as an industry to work together to ensure we all have the tools and the knowledge to protect ourselves—but especially our children---in their new digital, wireless, instantaneous, online-- but very real-- world.