

Statement for the Record of Rep. Eshoo on H.R. 678, the *PHONE Act*

U.S. House of Representatives

July 19, 2021

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 678, the *PHONE Act*, a simple but powerful bill to ensure that Americans who lose their homes in natural disasters do not also lose their home phone numbers.

Last year, the CZU Lightning Complex Fire burned 86,509 acres in my Congressional District, making it the 12th most destructive fire in California history. Seventy-seven thousand of my constituents were evacuated, and the fire destroyed nearly 1,500 homes, businesses, and other buildings.

This figure includes nearly 1,000 families in my district who couldn't return home because their home was destroyed. The *PHONE Act* helps these families and thousands of other American families who lose their homes in wildfires and other disasters.

The *PHONE Act* has three parts. First, if the President issues a major disaster declaration and a governor designates a disaster area, phone numbers in that designated area cannot be reassigned for one year. Second, if someone in the disaster area needs more than a year, they can get a one-year extension because rebuilding can take years. Third, the bill allows consumers to cancel phone service without a cancellation fee if their home is inaccessible or uninhabitable. The bill also prohibits resubscription fees if consumers get phone service somewhere else in the area.

Some may ask why we need all of this for a simple phone number. One of the first things parents teach their children is their phone number. Many of us still remember our parents' home phone numbers. While many are opting to live with just cellphones, it's important to consider who depends on landlines: older Americans and retirees who often have multiple doctors, caregivers, and loved ones using long-held phone numbers.

Congressman Mike Thompson authored the bill to help the survivors of the Atlas and Tubbs fires that ravished his Congressional District in 2017. Thousands lost their homes and were further frustrated to learn they also lost their phone number, because phone companies had given the numbers away.

The bill is carefully drafted to plug a small gap in the law, but this gap means the world to our constituents for whom this bill is written to protect.

Last Congress, the bill was marked up on March 10, 2020, by the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology and on September 9, 2020, by the full Energy & Commerce Committee. At both markups, I offered amendments to ensure the bill would have broad, bipartisan support and would be as effective as possible. On September 29, 2020, the House passed the bill by voice vote. Sadly, the Senate did not consider the measure.

I urge my House colleagues to pass this bill once again and urge the Senate take it up and pass the bill as well.