

telephone calls, and telephone company tariffs prohibit obscene language or harassing or frightening calls.

In 1966 the interstate calls reported to the Bell System as being obscene or harassing totaled 512, and in 1967, 470. In the District of Columbia in 1967 there were over 14,000 such calls reported. These two categories—interstate (and foreign) and District of Columbia—would be covered under this legislation.

With the enactment of this bill, full protection against abusive telephone calls would be provided. Such coverage, of course, is only part of the battle. The real difficulty is in determining the source of the calls. There has been a considerable effort by the Bell System to develop new techniques and equipment to help track down these phone calls, and with the cooperation of an informed and concerned public we may be able to reduce the growing number of these calls.

Mr. Chairman, I urge this subcommittee to take favorable action on this legislation.

Mr. KORNEGAY. Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Murphy.

Our next witness is also the sponsor of similar legislation, the Honorable Frank Brasco, of New York. Please proceed Mr. Brasco.

STATEMENT OF HON. FRANK J. BRASCO, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK

Mr. BRASCO. It is a pleasure for me to appear before this committee in support of my bill (H.R. 5867) to prohibit obscene and harassing telephone calls in the District of Columbia and in interstate or foreign commerce. Congressional consideration of such legislation dates back to the 89th Congress when a similar measure, S. 2825, was passed by the Senate on June 29, 1966. That bill was introduced by Senator Pastore and was unanimously approved by the Senate Committee on Commerce. However, House action was not completed and the measure was pending when the 89th Congress adjourned.

The purpose of my bill, like that of the Pastore bill, is to provide additional protection for telephone users. The telephone has become a business and family necessity. Without it much of our modern day social intercourse would be lost. But despite its many benefits, it provides a ready cloak of anonymity for the sort of person who derives morbid pleasure from harassing and frightening others.

The dimensions of the problem are large. It has been estimated that some 375,000 complaints about abusive telephone calls are recorded each year. Some steps have already been taken to deter the use of the telephone for abusive purposes. Thirty-eight States have enacted statutes dealing specifically with the problem and general statutes pertaining to breaches of the peace have been used, on occasion, to prosecute such abusive conduct in some of the remaining States. In addition, the telephone companies have taken certain action to deter crank calls. Devices have been developed to trace such calls. In New York City an annoyance call bureau has been set up by the telephone company to shield victims.

While all of such measures have been of great help in the attempt to eliminate harassing calls, they are not fully effective. Additional legislation is needed. The interstate gap needs to be closed and the prohibition needs to be extended to cover the District of Columbia.

Specifically, my bill makes it a Federal offense punishable by a fine