Assistance For Independent Living, Inc.

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

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Ms. Magalie Roman Salas
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
455-12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

RE: Ultra-Wideband
ET Docket 98-153

Dear Ms. Salas:

I am writing you in response to the FCC's Notice of Proposed Rule Making on ultra-wideband radio.

I am the Development Director of Assistance For Independent Living, Inc. (A.I.L.), a private non-profit agency serving elderly and adult physically disabled people. Our mission is: To support the independence and dignity of seniors and physically challenged adults through programs of education and personal assistance.

We at A.I.L. are excited by the potential application of the communications and radar features of ultra-wideband technology in regards to falls prevention. As an agency promoting the independence of seniors, we take falls prevention seriously. Falls are the leading cause of injury and accidental death among people age 65 and over. Many of our clients come to us for independent living assistance after having had a fall. Some tell harrowing tales of having spent days on the floor trapped in their own home before being found. We read stories in the newspaper of fallen seniors who were never found in time.

Doctors will often recommend that seniors who have fallen or are at risk for falling be institutionalized in a skilled nursing facility. When questioned about their recommendation, doctors state that their patient needs twenty-four hour supervision in case of a fall. This is an inappropriate use of a skilled nursing facility, inefficient use of resources, and not the best option for the patient's health. Skilled nursing facilities are designed to provide patients with costly twenty-four hour medical care and supervision. Institutionalization now costs an average of $35,000 per year. A device that could instantly detect a fall and call for help would eliminate the need for twenty-four hour supervision and be much less expensive. Ultra-wide band technology makes such a device possible.

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Moreover, such a device would enable seniors to remain at home and avoid institutionalization which restricts patient's physical activity, something doctors agree increases frailty. Numerous studies agree that patients who have suffered a fall can significantly improve their strength, stamina, and coordination through physical activity consequently significantly reducing future incidents of falls.[1 & 2]

A.I.L.'s services allow seniors who have experienced a fall or are at risk for falling to remain safely at home. Yet even our client's would benefit from a device that detects and reports falls. Our services allow seniors to remain safely at home by removing unsafe conditions within the home, assisting seniors with unsafe activities, encouraging seniors to obtain and follow medical advice regarding falls prevention, and by daily safety checks. Even so, there is a twenty-four hour time period during which our clients could potentially be trapped on the floor as a result of a fall. The thought of being trapped again is so terrifying that even seniors who receive daily safety checks or who live with relatives will restrict their physical activity out of fear. The result is increased weakness increasing the risk for a future fall.

C., a fearlessly independent lady over 90 years old, contacted A.I.L. for help with grocery shopping after losing her driver's license. C. still did all her own cooking and housekeeping and made frequent excursions into the neighborhood, including a daily one mile long walk. Then at age 95 C. fell and broke her hip. The doctor diagnosed osteoporosis and recommended that C. attempt to regain her pre-accident activity level. Terrified of being trapped again, C. restricted her physical activity, refusing even to walk to the mail box. A device that instantly detects and reports falls would have made it much easier for A.I.L. to convince C. to follow her doctor's advice.

In summary, A.I.L. would like to see the FCC come to a quick and positive decision regarding ultra-wideband radio technology so that a device can quickly be developed to detect and report falls. Such a device would improve the quality of life of seniors and significantly reduce the death rate due to falls. If you have further questions, please call me at (480) 966-9704 or e-mail me at inhome@earthlink.net.

Sincerely,

Holly Turner

Holly Turner
Development Director

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[1] Judge JO, Lindsey C, Underwood M, et. al. Balance improvements in older women: effects of exercise training. Phys Ther 1993;73(4):254-62, 263-5

[2] Lord SR, Caplan GA, Ward JA. Balance, reaction time, and muscle strength in exercising older women: a pilot study. Arch Phys Med Rehabil 1993; 74(8): 837-9.