

WASHINGTON -- Evonne Rodriguez-Sierra didn't realize the hassle she was signing up for when she agreed to help her son Carlos get tickets to John Mayer's concert in Omaha.

Carlos, 18, is a senior at Creighton Prep. His girlfriend wanted to take him to this month's show as a Christmas present, but neither one had a credit card. So Mom put the tickets on her debit card, the couple gave her the money, and she forgot all about the arrangement until months later.

A few hours before the concert was to begin, Carlos asked her to come downtown to the Qwest Center Omaha. The youths needed the person who had actually purchased the tickets, along with a photo ID and the card used to "Reluctantly, car and went all down there, not Rodriguez-Sierra She and others have been caught in Ticketmaster's latest efforts to combat rampant ticket scalping. With such frustrations mounting, Rep. Lee Terry, R-Neb., thinks it's an issue for Congress.

Carlos sat in his mom's car while she ran inside and got in line at the Mayer show. But her debit card wasn't accepted -- the bank had recently issued her a new one after someone used her card number illegally. So she had to stand in another line and answer a series of questions before finally obtaining the piece of paper that would admit the young couple into what they told her was a great show. "But what a pain in the neck," Rodriguez-Sierra said.

Ticketmaster created the paperless ticket system to combat the kind of scalping that marked singer Miley Cyrus' 2007 tour, when brokers bought up thousands of tickets within minutes. Fans were shut out or gouged by scalpers for hundreds or even thousands of dollars.

Concerts at the Qwest Center have used both traditional paper tickets and the new paperless ones, which can come with different restrictions. Last year's Miley Cyrus concert, for example, was all paperless. Fans were required to show up with the purchaser of the ticket, who had to present the credit card used and a photo ID. If the credit card holder who bought the ticket was out of town, the concertgoer was out of luck.

Terry last week introduced legislation that would prohibit companies such as Ticketmaster from placing those kinds of restrictions on tickets.

Terry said he doesn't want to help out scalpers, but he thinks the rights of ticketholders are being trampled. He noted that his legislation would leave state and local anti-scalping laws alone.

Congress clearly has weightier issues on its plate at the moment, and Terry said he doesn't

expect the legislation to end up on the president's desk anytime soon. But he hopes the bill will prompt hearings that can spotlight what is hapipening.

"The first step of this bill isn't to get it passed but to use it as a vehicle ... and let's have a discussion of what's the right way to go on this," Terry said.

A Ticketmaster spokeswoman did not respond to repeated phone calls and eimail requests for comment.

The Metropolitan Entertainment and Convention Authority oversees the Qwest Center Omaha. MECA's president and CEO, Roger Dixon, was unavailable for an interview but released a statement.

"Regarding this particular piece of proposed legislation, we would prefer to let private enterprise manage itself," it said. ". . . We feel it is best for the touring industry to work through these issues without regulatory intervention."

Omahan Nancy Cooke understands the headaches that can come with the new system. She purchased tickets to last year's Miley Cyrus concert for herself, her granddaughter and other relatives, but then found out that she had to be out of town on the day of the concert.

Fortunately for her group, the concert was postponed, and they were able to atitend on the new date.

Cooke said she understands the need to fight back against the scalpers -- they were one reason her family wasn't able to attend Cyrus' 2007 concert in Omaha.

Still, she said, those running the shows should consider the problems that people are having with the new system. She sugigested a compromise: Require concertigoers to show the credit card used to purichase their tickets, but the actual buyer needn't be present.

Contact the writer:

202-662-7270, joe.morton@owh.com

