

Opening Statement
Chairman Mike Doyle
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “Legislating to Stop the Onslaught of Annoying Robocalls”
April 30, 2019

Welcome everyone to today’s legislative hearing on solutions to a problem that we all have first-hand experience with, illegal robo-calls.

Today’s hearing will examine the onslaught of illegal robocalls and seven legislative proposals to help address this harmful, predatory, and extremely annoying practice. Among the bills we will consider today is Chairman Pallone’s “Stopping Bad Robocalls Act,” which I support and am an original cosponsor of, along with many members of the Committee. This bill offers a comprehensive set of solutions that I believe can help seriously reduce the number of robo-calls consumers receive.

We will also consider Ranking Member Latta’s “Stop Robo-Calls Act,” which I have also agreed to cosponsor. While I have some concerns about the bill, Ranking Member Latta and I have agreed to work together to resolve these issues in order to advance this legislation.

We will also be considering two bills from Congresswoman Eshoo the “Hang Up Act” and the “Robo Calls and Texts Act.” As well as Congressman Crist’s “Spam Calls Task Force Act of 2019,” Congresswoman Speier’s “Robocop Act,” and Congressman Van Drew’s “Robocall Enforcement Enhancement Act of 2019.”

I’d like to thank our panel of witnesses for appearing before us today to testify about this important issue and the legislation before the Subcommittee.

Unwanted Robocalls and Texts are the top consumer complaint received by the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission. According to the FCC’s Report on Robocalls, consumer complaints to the FCC have increased from one hundred fifty thousand a year in 2016 to two hundred thirty thousand in 2018. The Federal Trade Commission, which administers the Do Not Call Registry, received nearly 3.8 million complaints regarding robocalls last year alone.

As might be expected, the number of robocalls has exploded as well, topping out at nearly 48 billion last year, a 57% increase in volume from the year before, according to the “you-mail” robocall index. That number is estimated to increase to 60 billion by the end of this year. And while some of these calls constituted legitimate alerts and reminders, those calls accounted for only 20 percent of the total amount of robocalls.

In the month of March alone, phones in my home town of Pittsburgh received an estimated 37 million robocalls, which was an eight percent increase in the number of calls we received the month before.

The problem has gotten so bad that you can watch videos on the Internet of people getting robocalls while they are in the middle of making videos complaining about them. One of my favorites is of AT and T's CEO getting robo-called in the middle of an interview, showing that truly no one is immune to this nuisance.

Many phone services providers have begun making robocalling blocking technologies, like Mr. Foss's No-Mo-Robo service, available to their customers, and I applaud the efforts of those who offer these services to customers for free. I encourage all phone service providers to make these services available to their customers free of charge.

I believe that Congress and the FCC have an obligation to work with phone providers and their customers, whether they be institutions like the Cancer Moffitt Center, which is with us today to talk about this issue, or individual consumers, to not only help with the deployment of blocking technologies, but to work on addressing the underlying shortcomings of the law and our nation's telecommunications infrastructure, to help stem the tide of this harmful and predatory practice.

Thank you and I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses. With that I yield the remainder of my time to Congresswoman Eshoo.