

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “Legislation to Stop the Onslaught of Annoying Robocalls”
April 30, 2019

One of this Committee’s top priorities is putting consumers first – and one of the things I hear most from consumers back home is that they are sick and tired of robocalls.

Consumers today are facing more robocalls than ever. Government data from 2017 shows that New Jerseyans filed more complaints with the National Do Not Call Registry—per capita—than any other state about robocalls. It is getting so bad that some experts estimate that almost half of all calls to our cell phones this year will be robocalls.

We all know how annoying these calls are, but they are more insidious than that. Robocalls are not just being made for telemarketing, some callers are trying to defraud hard working Americans and seniors. In some instances, criminals are pestering consumers with one-ring calls hoping that they will call the number back and incur excessive charges.

Congress has taken bipartisan action in the past to help put consumers back in control of their cell phones. In 1991, Congress passed the Telephone Consumer Protection Act and then later authorized the Do Not Call Registry. But as technology has evolved, robocalls, and the threat they impose, have increased.

It is easier than ever for someone to begin making robocalls. Bad actors only need a smartphone with a few select applications to make spoofed robocalls. This means that existing approaches to stop these calls may not work anymore. We need to implement new call authentication technologies to clear these unwanted calls from our phone lines.

Regulators and industry need better tools to protect consumers, and once again, it is time for Congress act. Earlier this year I introduced the Stopping Bad Robocalls Act to turn the tide in the fight to against robocalls. There’s no one silver bullet, and that’s why it is so important that we address this problem from every side.

For example, the Stopping Bad Robocalls Act would require that carriers implement new call authentication technologies to help ensure that consumers know who is on the other end of the line when they pick up the phone. Implementing these technological solutions would also help consumers control who can reach them more generally.

My bill would also update the legal definition of autodialer to make sure that callers can’t use new technologies to get around the long-standing consumer protections against robocalls. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is currently studying how it could address its own interpretation of the term autodialer, and as part of that proceeding, the FCC could begin to fix

the problem on its own. When coming to a resolution, I would urge the Commission to put consumers first in this matter so that Congress doesn't have to redo its work.

I am hopeful the Commission will do just that, after all they took a pro-consumer approach to a provision I included in this legislation last Congress. That provision required the FCC to implement a reassigned number database to ensure that when a consumer gets a new telephone number, they aren't receiving the robocalls from the person that had the number before. In December the FCC adopted an order to implement a reassigned number database much like the one in my bill. I applaud this action, and I look forward to the FCC getting this database operational as quickly as possible.

Other than my bill, we will be discussing six other proposals today from both Democrats and Republicans. One of the bills before us was introduced by Subcommittee Ranking Member Latta. I look forward to hearing about his bill and discussing how to move bipartisan legislation forward quickly.

We also have proposals from Representatives Van Drew, Crist, and Speier that help push the conversation forward. Additionally, we will discuss two bills introduced by Representative Eshoo.

I look forward to working in a bipartisan fashion to finally stop the onslaught of these annoying calls.