

Advocates to FCC: Do More, Much More to Block Unwanted Robocalls

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Washington - The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has proposed new rules to clarify that voice service providers may block some spoofed robocalls. But much more must be done, according to comments filed with the FCC by advocates from the National Consumer Law Center, Consumers Union, the Consumer Federation of America, Consumer Action, National Association of Consumer Advocates, and Public Citizen.

“The FCC rules do something: they allow telephone companies to block spoofed calls from numbers that do not actually exist. But spoofer have simply moved to make fraudulent calls from real numbers—meaning that the rules do not cut down on the spoofed calls at all,” **said National Consumer Law Center Senior Counsel Margot Saunders**. “It’s like closing one door of a double door to keep the mice out—all the vermin will simply rush through the other door. Moreover, the rules are not even mandatory so telephone companies are free to ignore them.”

The national consumer organizations point out that meaningful authentication for all calls along with robocall-blocking tools will eliminate many, if not most, of the unwanted calls currently plaguing American phone subscribers. In their comments, the national consumer organizations urge the FCC to:

1. Require voice service providers to provide free, effective caller ID authentication for every call (subject only to public safety exceptions).
2. Require that all telephone companies provide free call-blocking services.
3. Establish an unblocking system that ensures that consumers can control calls they receive, and is maintained on a centralized basis paid for by the callers, rather than by the telephone providers.
4. Require providers to submit comprehensive information regularly to the FCC about the implementation and efficacy of their current call-blocking services, and release a yearly report in consultation with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) based on that information.

“Bad actors are continuing to find ways around the rules to prevent fraudulent robocalls and take advantage of consumers but there is more that can be done to protect consumers,” **said Maureen Mahoney, Policy Analyst at Consumers Union**. “The FCC should ensure that consumers can control the calls they receive by requiring that phone companies provide blocking technology free of charge to consumers.”

Unwanted robocalls are a worsening problem: in January 2018, 2.9 billion robocalls were placed in the United States; in June 2015, the number was 1.3 billion, according to YouMail.com. Four of the five top callers were debt collectors acting on behalf of credit card, bank, and cable companies.

The FCC is considering these rules under a section of the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA) that prohibits call spoofing. The TCPA is the federal law that protects consumers from

unwanted robocalls.

“Blocking illegal and unwanted calls isn’t a just a nice option to offer, it’s an essential protection from fraud and abuse,” **said Susan Grant, Director of Consumer Protection and Privacy at Consumer Federation of America.** “Government and industry must take effective steps to ensure that Americans’ no-call rights really work.”