

Consumer Groups Support FCC Allowing Limited Automated Calls Related to COVID-19 from Lenders to Customers

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National Consumer Law Center contact: Jan Kruse (jkruse@nclc.org)

Washington, D.C. – Six national consumer groups, including the National Consumer Law Center (on behalf of its low income client), filed comments with the FCC supporting part of the petition by the American Bankers Association and other lenders petition to make automated calls from the institutions to alert their customers to callers' offers related to the COVID-19 pandemic—provided that it is clearly limited in time and scope.

The Ex-Parte comments state that:

“Specifically, the groups support the FCC allowing, during the declared national emergency, limited numbers of automated calls from the described institutions for the purposes of alerting their customers to the callers' offers of the following specified kinds of relief related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including:

- Forbearance on loans secured by homes or vehicles;
- Payment deferrals on loans secured by homes or vehicles;
- Fee waivers on loans secured by homes or vehicles;
- Extension or relaxation of repayment terms on loans secured by homes or vehicles;
- Loan modifications on loans secured by homes or vehicles; and
- Other programs, relief and resources provided to assist debtors in response to the current pandemic relating to loans secured by homes or vehicles.”

The comments to the FCC also note that “It is important to emphasize that it is the extraordinary and particularly awful circumstances of this pandemic that has led us to support permitting these calls. Also, importantly, the lenders' petition specifies that none of these calls would include debt collection or marketing messages.”

If the FCC allows automated calls made without consent, the consumer groups urged the FCC to:

“1) explicitly prohibit any debt collection or telemarketing communication as part of the calls (other than to answer questions from the call recipient about the amount and terms of the debt that is the subject of the calls); 2) apply appropriate limits on the number of calls and require that prerecorded or artificial voice calls be concise, as the Commission required for fraud alerts by financial institutions in its July 10, 2015 order; and specify that these calls can only be made during the pendency of the federal emergency order.”