

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 23, 2019

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The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai,

I am writing to inquire into the current efforts to limit the number of robocalls Americans receive. I am specifically interested in what the Federal Communications Commission is doing to stop predatory scams implemented through robocalls, especially as they relate to deliberate impersonations of government officials, including what steps have been taken to protect consumers from excessive and predatory robocalls and how the issue of robocalls has been addressed to date.

On November 20, 2018, I received an automated call impersonating an official from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The call claimed to be a final notice of an outstanding case with the "Department of Tax and Crime Investigation." It instructed me to call the FBI to settle the fabricated case, and then recited a number for me to call back. I found this call to be very disconcerting.

It is illegal to impersonate a federal officer, and more must be done to stop these fraudulent harassing calls. Investigating further, it appears that the FBI has known about these robocalls since February 2017. The FBI Pittsburgh field office released a community outreach press release suggesting that the public "be suspicious of unsolicited phone calls." Nearly two years later these deceitful calls persist and continue to put Americans at risk of sharing personal identifiable information to scam artists.

Unsolicited robocalls are far more than an inconvenience to consumers – they are targeted threats to the general public. These calls are designed to manipulate individuals into revealing critical personal information such as their credit card and social security numbers and are increasing at an alarming rate. I request that the FCC share what it is doing to protect consumers from these fraudulent calls and to authenticate calls to unmask these callers and track down the perpetrators.

Elderly Americans are especially vulnerable as they are often the targets of these dishonest efforts. These calls include a variety of fraudulent offers pertaining to insurance policies, medical alert systems, and warnings of non-existing issues with their social security payments. A growing number of calls are related to debts that robocalls claim the receiver owes. In November 2018 alone, 5.1 billion calls were made in an attempt to extract personal information and money from citizens across the country.

Aside from robbing victims of their time and money, another critical threat these robocalls pose is the erosion of trust in federal agencies. Every call a consumer receives in which the caller impersonates a government official will make consumers question the legitimacy of authentic communication from government agencies in the future. Citizens deserve government agencies they can place their trust in, but as robocalls continue, their trust only erodes, especially if they fall prey to these predatory efforts.

Unsolicited calls like these endanger the financial security and right to privacy of millions of Americans, and more must be done to stop them. I look forward to working with the FCC to protect consumers from unsolicited calls.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Cc: The Honorable Christopher Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigations
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20535

The Honorable Kathleen Kraninger
Director
Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
1700 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20552