

Media Contact:

Office of Media Relations, (202) 418-0500
MediaRelations@fcc.gov

For Immediate Release**FCC PROPOSES NEARLY \$13 MILLION FINE FOR ILLEGAL SPOOFED ROBOCALLS*****Robocaller Launched ‘Neighbor Spoofing’ Campaigns Which Specifically Targeted Communities in Six States with the Intent to Cause Harm***

WASHINGTON, January 30, 2020—The Federal Communications Commission today proposed a \$12,910,000 fine against an individual for apparently using caller ID spoofing in thousands of robocalls that targeted specific communities with the intent to cause harm. For example, the caller made unlawful, spoofed robocalls to target a community grappling with the recent murder of a local woman, threaten a journalist and newspaper, and attempt to influence a jury. Additionally, the caller made unlawful, spoofed robocalls related to political campaigns in California, Florida, and Georgia.

The Truth in Caller ID Act prohibits manipulating caller ID information with the intent to defraud, cause harm, or wrongfully obtain anything of value. The FCC’s Enforcement Bureau led an investigation that found six apparent campaigns by this caller. The caller appears to have used an online calling platform to intentionally manipulate caller ID information so that the calls he was making appeared to come from local numbers – a technique called “neighbor spoofing.” The robocall campaigns included:

- **California** – The caller apparently made 1,496 spoofed robocalls in May 2018 about the state’s U.S. Senate primary. Among other things, the calls attacked the incumbent U.S. Senator’s Jewish heritage using an anti-Semitic trope accusing her of dual loyalties.
- **Florida** - The caller apparently made 766 spoofed robocalls in October 2018 to make racist attacks about a Florida gubernatorial candidate. The robocalls falsely claimed to be from the candidate and used “a caricature of a black dialect” with jungle background noises.
- **Georgia** – The caller apparently made 583 spoofed robocalls in November 2018 to make racist calls attacking a Georgia gubernatorial candidate. The calls pretended to be from Oprah Winfrey and concerned a racist and anti-Semitic conspiracy theory.
- **Idaho** – The caller apparently made 750 spoofed robocalls in September 2018 to residents of Sandpoint, Idaho. The calls attacked the local newspaper, the *Sandpoint Reader*, and its publisher, after the paper had exposed the identity of the caller as the robocaller involved in other calling campaigns. The calls in Sandpoint identified the publisher by name and threateningly called on residents to “Burn out the cancer.”
- **Iowa** – The caller apparently made 827 spoofed robocalls in August 2018 following the murder of a local college student and the arrest of an illegal alien from Mexico for the crime. The calls were directed at Brooklyn, Iowa residents and used the town’s local phone number code information. The calls talked about a “brown horde” or

“savages” and said the murder victim would have said to “Kill them all.” Those who received these calls included the victim’s family members.

- **Virginia** – The caller apparently made 2,023 spoofed robocalls in November and December 2018 to residents of Charlottesville, Virginia during the trial of James Fields who was charged with murdering Heather Heyer by driving an automobile into a crowd of protesters. The calls articulated a racist and anti-Semitic conspiracy theory, which blamed local officials for the crime. The timing of the calls suggests an attempt by the caller to influence the jury. The judge questioned the jurors about the robocalls and explicitly instructed the jury pool to ignore the robocalls.

The caller was apparently motivated by a belief that these actions would result in media notoriety and accordingly would enable him to increase publicity for his website and personal brand. In the process, he apparently broke the law. The FCC, Federal Trade Commission, and local law enforcement all received numerous complaints from consumers about apparently spoofed robocalls from this caller.

The proposed action, formally called a Notice of Apparent Liability for Forfeiture, or NAL, contains only allegations that advise a party on how it has apparently violated the law and may set forth a proposed monetary penalty. The Commission may not impose a greater monetary penalty in this case than the amount proposed in the NAL. Neither the allegations nor the proposed sanctions in the NAL are final Commission actions. The party will be given an opportunity to respond and the Commission will consider the party’s submission of evidence and legal arguments before acting further to resolve the matter.

Action by the Commission January 30, 2020 by Notice of Apparent Liability for Forfeiture (FCC 20-9). Chairman Pai, Commissioners O’Rielly, Carr, and Starks approving. Commissioner Rosenworcel dissenting. Chairman Pai, Commissioners O’Rielly, Rosenworcel, and Starks issuing separate statements.

###

Media Relations: (202) 418-0500 / ASL: (844) 432-2275 / TTY: (888) 835-5322 / Twitter: @FCC / www.fcc.gov

This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).