

Bipartisan House Bill Moves Forward in the Fight to Stop Unwanted Robocalls

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: JULY 17, 2019

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Washington, D.C. – Today, the U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce passed unanimously (48-0) the Stopping Bad Robocalls Act (HR 3375). The bipartisan bill was introduced in June by Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ) and Rep. Greg Walden (R-OR), chair and ranking member, respectively, of the U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce, and has 135 additional co-sponsors, including original co-sponsors Mike Doyle (D-PA) and Rep. Bob Latta (R-OH), chair and ranking member of the communications subcommittee.

“I am especially pleased to see bipartisan support for this bill and thank the original co-sponsors for their leadership,” **said National Consumer Law Center Senior Attorney Margot Saunders.** “As robocalls plague voters of all political stripes we hope that all members of the U.S. House as well as the Senate will also support this strong consumer bill.”

“Consumers have made it clear — robocalls are out of control, and this vote gets us one step closer to a new national law to help stop them,” **said Maureen Mahoney, policy analyst for Consumer Reports.** “This bill would put real safeguards in place to protect people from the daily, relentless ring of unwanted robocalls. They aren’t just annoying. Shady businesses and individuals are using them to prey on people’s wallets and personal data. We commend the Committee for its action today, and look forward to seeing the strongest possible bill enacted into law.”

The bill, which now heads to a vote on the floor of the U.S. House, will provide new protections from robocallers by requiring the Federal Communications Commission to 1) issue comprehensive regulations to stop callers from making unwanted and illegal automated calls and texts, 2) implement meaningful call authentication technology to help stop harmful “spoofed” calls and 3) ensure that call blocking programs are not charged to consumers. The bill also requires the FCC to create a database that callers can check to avoid making robocalls to a telephone number that has been reassigned to someone else.

Robocalls surged after a 2018 decision from the U.S. Court of Appeals in D.C. that set aside a 2015 FCC order on the question of how to interpret the Telephone Consumer Protection Act’s (TCPA’s) ban on autodialed calls to cell phones without the called party’s consent. This decision raised the specter that the prohibition might be interpreted not to cover the autodialing systems that are currently used to deluge cell phones with unwanted calls.

Last year, Americans received more than 47 billion robocalls, with 60 billion estimated for this year. In June 2019, each of the top 20 sources of robocalls were collectors attempting to collect on debts owed to well-known businesses, including Capital One, Wells Fargo, Comcast, Citibank, and Target, or third-party debt collectors and debt buyers that have been subject to numerous enforcement actions by the federal government for illegal or abusive collection tactics (TransWorld Systems Inc., Credit Acceptance, and Portfolio Recovery), according to YouMail, a robocall blocking provider.