



UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION
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Prepared Remarks of Chairman Joseph Simons¹
USTelecom Forum: Turning the Tide on Illegal Robocalls
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Few things are as frustrating as answering a phone call only to hear that most unwanted sound—a recorded message trying to scam you or sell you something. Whether it is a fraudulent call claiming to be from the IRS or Social Security Administration, or an intrusive call hawking home alarm systems or solar panels, no one wants these calls.

The FTC has a history of sustained, relentless enforcement to fight these harmful and detested robocalls. But the FTC has also known for a long time that reducing unwanted calls requires more than just law enforcement. Industry-led technological solutions are also crucial. So we are thankful to USTelecom for convening this event to deepen government and industry collaboration. To set the stage, I will briefly outline the FTC's ongoing three-prong efforts to combat illegal robocalls.

First and foremost, the FTC is a civil law enforcement agency. We have an unmatched record litigating in federal court to protect consumers from abusive and fraudulent calls. The FTC has brought 141 cases alleging Do Not Call or robocall violations. And our collections have exceeded \$124 million, which includes both equitable monetary relief and civil penalties.

¹ These remarks reflect my own views. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the Commission or any other individual Commissioner.

Our enforcement program falls into two categories: fraud and abuse. In our typical robocall cases involving fraud, we do an undercover investigation without notifying the targets. Then we file an ex parte motion for a temporary restraining order, asking the judge to freeze the defendants' bank accounts, appoint a receiver to take control of the business, and enjoin the illegal practices. We seek equitable monetary relief, and whenever possible, we will return the money to victims of the fraud. In abusive telemarketing cases where the calls invade consumers' privacy and can be harassing, we typically seek civil penalties—that can be up to \$42,530 for each violation.

The second prong of our robocall program is supporting industry-led technological solutions. In 2012, the FTC held its first public challenge—essentially a contest with a cash prize—to develop call blocking technology. At the time, there were few, if any, call blocking applications available on the market. From 2012 to 2015, the FTC held three additional robocall challenges.² Today, there are hundreds of call blocking solutions on the market, including two that won FTC challenges. More recently, in 2017, in order to do more to support call blocking initiatives, we started a daily public release of consumer complaint data, which call analytics companies can use as part of their algorithms to score calls.³

Finally, the third prong of our robocall program is robust consumer and business education. For consumers, the message is simple: do not answer calls from unfamiliar numbers; if you do answer, hang up on illegal or unwanted calls. For legitimate businesses seeking

² See, e.g., FTC Press Release, *FTC Awards \$25,000 Top Cash Prize for Contest-Winning Mobile App That Blocks Illegal Robocalls* (Aug. 17, 2015), <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2015/08/ftc-awards-25000-top-cash-prize-contest-winning-mobile-app-blocks>; FTC Press Release, *FTC Announces Winners of “Zapping Rachel” Robocall Contest* (Aug. 28, 2014), <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2014/08/ftc-announces-winners-zapping-rachel-robocall-contest>; FTC Press Release, *FTC Announces Robocall Challenge Winners* (Apr. 2, 2013), <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2013/04/ftc-announces-robocall-challenge-winners>.

³ FTC Press Release, *FTC Escalates the Fight against Illegal Robocalls Using Consumer Complaints to Aid Industry Call-Blocking Solutions* (Aug. 1, 2017), <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2017/08/ftc-escalates-fight-against-illegal-robocalls-using-consumer>.

compliance advice, we have substantial information on our website.⁴ The key message to legitimate businesses is know your partners. Know your telemarketers. Know your lead generators. Know your dialers. And make sure all of them comply with the Telemarketing Sales Rule.

We are proud of the breadth and success of the FTC's multi-faceted approach to stop unwanted calls. But we know more needs to be done to combat illegal robocalls. So thank you again to USTelecom, and thank you to everyone participating and attending this event.

⁴ See generally <https://www.ftc.gov/tips-advice/business-center/advertising-and-marketing/telemarketing>.