

Steve Largent
President/CEO

October 9, 2013

The Honorable Claire McCaskill
Chairwoman
Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Subcommittee on Consumer Protection
506 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator McCaskill:

In your letter of August 16, you asked for CTIA, no later than October 15, to provide an analysis of the challenges the wireless industry foresees in implementing technology solutions to help combat the problem of robocalling.

As all of the witnesses at the hearing agreed, despite the Truth In Caller ID Act of 2009, it is fairly easy for anyone who wants to hide their true phone number to “spoof” the Caller ID number of an inbound call. Accordingly, any technology solution predicated on the “caller ID” of a call is very likely to fail. Beyond the problems related to spoofing, several other impediments stand in the way of deploying effective technological solutions to illegal robocalling. First, as common carriers, wireless carriers are not supposed to discriminate or exercise discretion in completing what they – in good faith – may perceive to be “legitimate” or “illegitimate” calls. Thus, if there is to be “predictive” or “crowd sourced” blocking, it should be controlled by the recipients of unwelcome calls and not by carriers.

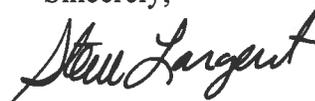
Second, even if a “blacklist” database could be created, how would a carrier or database manager populate such a database? One of the major problems with illegal robocalls, especially those that originate from outside of the United States, is the ease with which entities making such calls spoof their numbers – in many cases using numbers of legitimate unsuspecting users. As a result, the actual numbers listed in a database may belong to innocent people, and the real numbers (if there even are telephone numbers associated with calls originated anywhere in the world using VOIP technology and routed through proxy servers) would not be included in the database. Moreover, if database lookups became the norm, robocallers easily could defeat “blacklists” by changing the spoofed number with every robocall.

Finally, whether based on a telephone number, crowd-sourced customer reporting, or common call characteristics (“call profiling”) a carrier or database manager would still have to make a subjective determination regarding which calls are “legitimate” and thus consented to (e.g., school closings, flight delays, etc.) and which calls are not. Identical robocall messages can be either lawful or unlawful based solely on the status of the recipient’s consent – which a carrier will have no knowledge of. Even if the technical impediments could be resolved, customers, privacy advocates, and policymakers may have concerns with a regime that requires carriers to inspect and approve each call addressed to a customer on their network.

However, the industry is working on a longer term solution that attacks the problem at its source – the IP networks where unsolicited robocalls are originated. This solution would create “certificates” that could be used to authenticate the caller ID or network address associated with the true sender. Such transparency would permit recipients to screen messages that are not authenticated and would provide the needed “antiseptic” to the plague of caller ID spoofing. Industry standards groups are working on this solution, which, upon completion of the development phase, will require at least a two- to three-year implementation timeline. Henning Schulzrinne, the FCC’s Chief Technologist, has prepared a presentation describing this approach which is available at <http://www.nanc-chair.org/docs/documents.html> (under “Sep 13 Call ID Spoofing Presentation”). While this type of solution appears promising, it is always possible that robocallers will try to adapt their practices to circumvent this solution as well. Accordingly, as CTIA’s Mike Altschul noted in his testimony, it would be premature to impose this or any other technical solution as a mandate.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into your and the Subcommittee’s consideration of these issues. Please let me know if CTIA can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steve Largent". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Steve Largent
President and CEO

Thanks Senator!