Carriers Seek New Call-Blocking Authority; Consumer Groups Want Tough Robocalling Rules

Parties urged new FCC actions to combat unwanted robocalls, differing on specifics. Telecom providers seek more call-blocking authority with regulatory flexibility; consumer groups recommend a more prescriptive approach; and telemarketers want fine-tuning to better target illegal calls and reduce "false positives" blocking legal calls. Comments were posted through Tuesday on a **public notice** to update the record in docket **17-59**, after a November **order** authorized voice providers to block calls deemed highly likely to be illegal: from phone numbers on a "Do-Not-Originate" list and "those that purport to be from invalid, unallocated, or unused numbers."

CTIA backed "broader call-blocking," with "robust safe harbors" to protect carriers. "Encourage multiple techniques and technologies," such as "know-your-customer practices, stipulations in contracts, SHAKEN/STIR [Secure Handling of Asserted information using toKENs/Secure Telephone Identify Revisited], tools that enable consumers to label and block illegal robocalls, consumer education, and traceback," CTIA **said**. It opposed regulating "the perceived problem of erroneous labeling and blocking." USTelecom "generally supports expanding the authority of voice providers to voluntarily block, label, or otherwise mitigate illegal robocalls." Mandates "would be unwise," it **said**. The Voice on the Net Coalition **opposed** a safe harbor, saying its absence "pushes carriers to improve their call blocking techniques."

Call blocking should be part of a "multi-faceted approach" that includes USTelecom's industry traceback group, Shaken/Stir and "close coordination with law enforcement," **said** AT&T. It said it has blocked 4.2 million calls on its wholesale network since October 2016 but lacks "clear authority to block illegal calls elsewhere outside the context" of the November order. It urged rules to enable "providers (including AT&T) on other platforms to block illegal robocalls in their networks on a permissive basis." T-Mobile **found** 5.2 billion of 53 billion screened calls were likely fraudulent, blocking 986 million, as subscribers increasingly use its "Scam Block" option. It sought "holistic solutions" as "fraudsters" adapt "their tricks" to disguise their calls in ways providers "cannot yet fully address," including "neighbor spoofing" of legitimate numbers that appear local and using multiple CLEC facilities to transport traffic.

Comcast endorsed expanded robocall blocking, including authorizing voice providers with end-to-end Shaken/Stir call authentication "to block calls that fail authentication where the originating provider has also implemented that protocol for the type of call at issue." Noting scammer evolution, it **suggested** a "general rule authorizing providers to block calls based on any reasonable method recognized by industry standard-setting organizations or similar bodies." Charter Communications **said** a general presumption in favor of standards-derived call blocking "would enable industry to address new problems efficiently, without requiring the Commission to keep pace with malfeasors." The American Cable Association **sought** "affirmation that robocall-blocking technologies can be deployed on an opt-out basis."

Keep "privately enforceable and effective" Telephone Consumer Protection Act rules, **advised** Consumers Union, National Consumer Law Center, Consumer Federation of America, Consumer Action, National Association of Consumer Advocates, Public Citizen and Public Knowledge. They urged requiring phone companies to implement caller ID authentication by a certain date, among other actions. The Electronic Privacy Information Center **recommended** requiring phone providers "to proactively block calls from numbers that are unassigned, unallocated, or invalid," prohibiting "spoofing if there is an intent to defraud or cause harm" and encouraging "the use of call authentication technology that safeguards caller anonymity."

Telemarketers urged caution on giving providers new call-blocking authority and sought actions on false positives. American Bankers Association members continue to report "outbound calls may be incorrectly 'labeled' as 'possible fraud, 'scam, or 'debt collector' in the caller-ID message displayed on the call recipient's phone," it **said**. "The FCC should not permit other criteria to form the basis for call-blocking unless those criteria allow a Provider to verify, with a high degree of certainty, that the caller is spoofing illegally."

FCC efforts to distinguish between "illegal callers" and "lawful, high-volume callers" are welcome, **said** SiriusXM, noting its "legal marketing efforts have been impacted" by anti-robocalling efforts. It backed addressing "improper call labeling ... often tantamount to call blocking," "immediate action" to "eliminate false positives," creating a "trusted caller database" ("white list"), "intercept messages" for blocked or labeled calls, and requirements for provider responses on "overblocking." ITTA **said** an industrywide white list would facilitate timely information sharing. Securus **called** for a "challenge mechanism to assist in ensuring swift resolution when lawful calls are inadvertently blocked."

"T-Mobile's vendor, First Orion, offers a platform ... that enables call originators to proactively engage to minimize any issues," the carrier said. Industry is "in an arms race combating phone scams," **said** First Orion. "We will be in the race until we make phone scams un-profitable."