

**Testimony of
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before the
United States Senate Special Committee on Aging
“Still Ringing Off The Hook: An Update on Efforts to Combat Robocalls”
October 4, 2017**

Chairman Collins, Ranking Member Casey, Members of the Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Kevin Rupy, and I serve as Vice President of Law and Policy at USTelecom. Over the last several years, USTelecom and our member companies have been tremendously focused on the robocall issue, and we share the Committee’s concern about the problems associated with phone-based impostor scams targeted at seniors. Calls using Voice-over-Internet-Protocol (VoIP) technology when combined with Caller ID spoofing can be used by scammers to mask their identity and location, giving their target a false sense of confidence about who is calling.

In this ongoing battle against criminal robocallers, there have been three important developments over the last year that are particularly significant.

First, the industry-led, ecosystem-wide Robocall Strike Force issued its report to the Federal Communications Commission on October 26, 2016. Comprehensive follow-up reports by the industry groups continuing the work started by the Strike Force were delivered to the FCC on April 28, 2017. These reports, taken together, catalogue industry’s substantial eight month effort to advance the battle against illegal robocalls. These reports hold a significant amount of good news for consumers, including seniors. For example, the reports note that the SHAKEN/STIR

standards development for the next generation of robocall mitigation tools that the industry had initiated prior to the Robocall Strike Force, have been accelerated by six months. These standards, which incorporate caller-ID authentication capabilities into the network and consumer devices, have entered the industry testing phase. Some of the initial testing of the SHAKEN standard is expected to complete later this year, with additional potential deployments anticipated as early as 2018. The reports also highlight the increasing number of tools that are being developed and actively deployed to consumers, by a growing number of national voice and device providers. Finally, the reports detail the efforts of USTelecom's Industry Traceback Group, which is comprised of a broad range of network providers from the cable, wireline, wireless and wholesale industries, who are working collaboratively in order to identify the origin of these calls at their source. Industry's strong commitment to this effort can be seen its significant growth over the last year, from just 3 carriers in July, 2016, to 22 providers as of today. The ultimate goal of this group is to identify the source of the worst of these illegal calls, and further enable enforcement actions by federal agencies. In this regard, we applaud the FCC's three recent enforcement actions since June of this year that have resulted in more than \$200 million in proposed fines targeting perpetrators of illegal robocalling, as well as complementary enforcement actions by the FTC.

Second, the reports shows that USTelecom member companies, independent application developers and a growing number of diverse companies offer services today that can help older Americans reduce unknown and potentially fraudulent calls. For example, AT&T has launched its 'Call Protect' service that allows customers with iPhones and HD Voice enabled Android handsets to automatically block suspected fraudulent calls. Verizon has been trialing a service that warns its wireline customers about calls identified as suspicious, and on the wireless side has

deployed robocall mitigation features as part of its Caller Name ID service. And various carriers have worked with NoMorobo to facilitate their customers' ability to use that third-party blocking service, such as Verizon's "one click" solution that simplifies customers' ability to sign up for the service.

Third, the FCC recently published a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in which it proposes to clarify rules for when voice providers may block certain types of calls. USTelecom supports the proposed rules and has participated fully in the proceeding. One issue the FCC raises is what protections legitimate callers should have if their calls are blocked due to the inappropriate scoring of their call. That is an important topic both for situations where voice providers block numbers directly, and for blocking services that consumers may opt into in order to block or filter potentially unwanted calls. It is an issue USTelecom and its members, and other parts of the robocall labeling/scoring ecosystem, have been wrestling with for years, and this fall we are hosting a workshop aimed at helping develop "best practices" for the scoring and labelling of calls.

All these recent developments further demonstrate the essential commitment from a broad range of stakeholders that will be necessary to effectively mitigate and defeat these scammers.

Indispensable industry stakeholders from a wide range of companies – including cable, wireline, wireless, and wholesale providers, as well as standards organizations, equipment manufacturers and apps developers – have advanced a concerted, broad-based, effort focused on developing practices, technologies and methods for mitigating phone-based attacks and scams. This coalition has also expanded its cooperation with equally important stakeholders within the federal government and with consumer groups. While our partners in government play a crucial

enforcement role, our partners in consumer organizations are vital to raising awareness about the tools available to consumer to help mitigate illegal robocalls.

Industry efforts to address the illegal robocall issue remain ongoing and extremely energized. Importantly, these efforts are being undertaken by the necessary broad range of industry stakeholders, including representatives from the wireline, wireless, wholesale, cable and app developer community, as well as critically important standards organizations. The results of these comprehensive industry efforts are detailed in the industry-led Strike Force report submitted to the Federal Communications Commission in April of this year. The collaborative efforts outlined in the report are highly detailed, extremely comprehensive and warrant more than a brief summary. In order for the Committee to gain a better and complete understanding of these efforts, USTelecom is submitting the April Strike Force Report as an addendum to this written testimony.

In closing, let me again thank the Committee for holding this timely hearing. We share the Committee's concerns, and we look forward to our continued work together to address this constantly evolving challenge.