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January 14, 2019

VIA ECFS

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: *Advanced Methods To Target and Eliminate Unlawful Robocalls, WC Docket No. 17-59*

Dear Ms. Dortch:

Enclosed please find AT&T's response to Commissioner Rosenworcel's letter dated December 12, 2018 to John Donovan, CEO of AT&T Communications. Please contact me should you have any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Amanda E. Potter

Amanda E. Potter

Enclosure



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January 14, 2019

The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel
Commissioner
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Commissioner Rosenworcel:

On behalf of AT&T,¹ I write in response to your December 12, 2018 letter to John Donovan, CEO of AT&T Communications, inquiring about the consumer tools, and free tools in particular, that AT&T makes available to combat illegal and unwanted robocalls. As documented most recently in our comments in response to the public notice issued by the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau,² AT&T offers a variety of such tools and, indeed, is an industry leader in the fight against the scourge of illegal and unwanted calls.³ Consistent with that prior filing and others we have made in the proceeding referenced above, this letter provides a report on our efforts to-date, and identifies areas where we are continuing to work with the Commission to eliminate regulatory barriers currently preventing voice service providers from taking more aggressive steps against fraudsters.

¹ AT&T Services, Inc. files this letter on behalf of AT&T Mobility and its wireline operating affiliates (collectively, “AT&T”).

² Public Notice, FCC, *Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau Seeks Input for Report on Robocalling*, CG Docket No. 17-59, DA 18-638 (rel. June 20, 2018).

³ Comments of AT&T, CG Docket No. 17-59 (filed July 20, 2018) (“AT&T Robocall Report Comments”); *see also* Comments of AT&T, CG Docket No. 17-59 (filed Sept. 24, 2018) (advocating for expanded provider-initiated call blocking authority) (“AT&T Robocall Record Refresh Comments”).

A. AT&T Offers a Variety of Tools to Consumers To Combat Illegal and Unwanted Calls.

Recognizing that consumers need a whole toolbox of tools to stop robocalls,⁴ AT&T offers multiple call blocking options across its platforms. Customers of AT&T's post-paid mobile wireless, interconnected VoIP, and legacy telephone services all have access to such options, many of which are available at no charge to the customer. While AT&T continues to innovate and improve in this area, below is a summary of AT&T's current offerings.

AT&T Call Protect. In December 2016, AT&T launched AT&T Call Protect for post-paid mobile wireless customers.⁵ AT&T Call Protect is an opt-in service, available at no additional charge, that automatically blocks potential fraud calls and labels calls from telephone numbers identified with other suspect or potentially unwanted sources, including telemarketer, suspected spam, and other categories of calls. The service works across AT&T's nationwide wireless network, on any eligible iOS or Android smartphone,⁶ whenever the subscriber is located in an AT&T HD Voice coverage area.⁷ AT&T also offers the AT&T Call protect companion application (again, at no additional charge), which allows AT&T Call Protect subscribers to access additional features of the AT&T Call Protect service, including a personal block list.⁸ While the app provides useful additional features, the AT&T Call Protect service does not require download or activation of the app. As of December 31, 2018, AT&T has blocked more than 391 million fraud calls, and labeled more than 552 million spam calls, through AT&T Call Protect.⁹

AT&T Call Protect Plus. AT&T Mobility customers with eligible iOS and Android devices also have the option to subscribe to AT&T Call Protect *Plus* for a charge of \$3.99 per month.¹⁰ AT&T Call Protect Plus offers all of the benefits of the free AT&T Call Protect service, plus a number of additional features, including enhanced caller ID and reverse number lookup.¹¹ AT&T

⁴ AT&T Blog Team, *We Need a Whole Toolbox To Stop Robocalls*, AT&T Global Public Policy Blog (Mar. 22, 2018, 11:36 AM), <https://www.attpublicpolicy.com/consumers/we-need-a-whole-toolbox-to-stop-robocalls/>.

⁵ See Press Release, AT&T, AT&T Unveils Call Protect To Help Customers Manage Unwanted Calls (Dec. 20, 2016), http://about.att.com/story/att_call_protect.html.

⁶ Phones must be HD Voice-enabled to be eligible. Eligible smartphones include iPhone 6 or above running iOS v9.3+ and AT&T HD Voice-enabled Android smartphone.

⁷ See <https://www.att.com/esupport/article.html#!/wireless/KM1137805>.

⁸ See <https://www.att.com/esupport/article.html#!/wireless/KM1147710>.

⁹ Call block totals for AT&T Call Protect are distinct from, and do not include, calls blocked through AT&T Call Protect Plus, Digital Phone Call Protect, and AT&T's other blocking programs, described herein.

¹⁰ See <https://www.att.com/esupport/article.html#!/wireless/KM1252905>. AT&T Call Protect Plus is offered together with the protection of the AT&T Mobile Security service.

¹¹ See *id.*

Call Protect Plus users also have the option to identify entire categories of calls (e.g., political or survey calls) to block or send to voicemail (or accept) through the custom call control feature.¹²

Suspected Spam and Fraud Alerts. AT&T's most recent addition to the AT&T Call Protect suite of services launched just last month.¹³ The new service, available on an opt-out basis for customers with eligible smartphones who enroll in one of our current post-paid wireless plans, is offered at no additional charge. The service labels calls from telephone numbers identified with suspect or potentially unwanted sources.

Digital Phone Call Protect. In November 2017, AT&T expanded AT&T Call Protect to customers of AT&T Home Phone,¹⁴ AT&T's consumer VoIP service.¹⁵ Much like AT&T Call Protect for mobile wireless customers, Digital Phone Call Protect is an opt-in service, offered at no additional charge to customers, that automatically blocks calls from known scammers, and sends customers a caller ID alert if a call is suspected spam.¹⁶ As of December 31, 2018, AT&T has blocked more than 12.2 million incoming calls and labeled more than 11.7 million calls for Digital Phone Call Protect subscribers.¹⁷

AT&T Smart Call Blocker Phones. AT&T also has entered into a relationship with an equipment manufacturer and distributor to offer consumers an AT&T-branded telephone with call blocking capabilities. AT&T Smart Call Blocker phones work with any landline voice service (including legacy switched voice service) and on all wireline networks (not just AT&T's), for any consumer with caller ID.¹⁸ AT&T Smart Call Blocker phones range in price from \$59.95 to \$119.95 and are manufactured by VTech. There is no additional charge for the call blocker features once the equipment is purchased. The phone screens incoming calls from telephone numbers not included on the consumer's list of trusted telephone numbers. Any such caller receives an intercept

¹² See *id.*

¹³ See Barbara Roden, AT&T, *AT&T Extends Call Protection to More Customers Through Suspected Spam and Fraud Alerts* (Dec. 13, 2018), https://about.att.com/inside_connections_blog/2018/120/att_extends_call_protection.html.

¹⁴ In addition to the features of Digital Phone Call Protect, described herein, AT&T Home Phone customers may block up to 100 telephone numbers, simply by pressing *61 after receiving the unwanted incoming call. Customers also can set up and edit a call block list online through their myAT&T account.

¹⁵ See Press Release, AT&T, *Protecting You From Unwanted Calls* (Nov. 29, 2017), http://about.att.com/newsroom/unwanted_calls.html.

¹⁶ See <https://www.att.com/esupport/article.html#!/u-verse-voice/KM1235421>.

¹⁷ Call block totals for Digital Phone Call Protect are distinct from, and do not include, calls blocked through AT&T Call Protect, AT&T Call Protect Plus, and AT&T's other blocking programs, discussed herein.

¹⁸ See <https://telephones.att.com/telephones/cordless-telephones/smart-call-blocker>.

message and is required either to press a key or to record his/her name before the call will ring through to the consumer. This intermediate step, among other benefits, has the effect of diverting callers who are not live persons. Such a screen therefore helps to eliminate certain illegal and unwanted robocalls that use an artificial or pre-recorded voice.

Consumer Information and Education. While consumer call blocking tools are an integral part of AT&T's fight against illegal and unwanted robocalls, educating consumers about known threats and common fraudster tactics also are critically important. AT&T's Cyber Aware Resources page includes alerts on recently identified scams and provides links to other important consumer resources, as well as instructions for reporting various types of fraud (including telephone call fraud).¹⁹ AT&T pushes this educational content through social media and digital advertising. AT&T also issues consumer alerts when fraud events are identified.²⁰

B. AT&T Is Blocking Illegal Traffic on Its Network Where Legally Permitted.

Separate and apart from the consumer tools that AT&T offers, AT&T has developed and deployed other network-based call blocking capabilities to combat the volume of illegal traffic directed at consumers. Indeed, as is now well-documented, AT&T launched a program in late 2016 to identify and block illegal traffic delivered to AT&T from providers purchasing AT&T's IP-based call termination service. Consistent with the terms of the contractual arrangements with customers of its IP-based call termination service, AT&T blocks calls from telephone numbers that it determines constitute prohibited traffic on its network.²¹ Since its inception, the program has prevented approximately 4.5 billion illegal calls from ever reaching their intended destination. AT&T has designed its call blocking program to target only illegal robocalls and has developed and implemented robust detection and investigative techniques. Leveraging big data intelligence, AT&T monitors its network for suspicious traffic. When identified, AT&T's team of experienced fraud investigators opens an investigation. Their investigation involves multiple steps, often including: gathering additional call detail information, online research, and outreach to service providers to authenticate the fraud team's independent investigation. Critically, among other steps AT&T takes to avoid impacting legitimate traffic, every suspect telephone number is dialed by a fraud investigator

¹⁹ See <http://about.att.com/sites/cybersecurity/resources/contact>. See also, e.g., <https://www.att.com/robocalls>; <https://about.att.com/sites/cyberaware/ni/blog/caller-id-spoofing>; <https://about.att.com/sites/cyberaware/ae/robocall>; <https://www.att.com/esupport/report-call-or-text.html>.

²⁰ See, e.g., <http://about.att.com/sites/cybersecurity/ar/wangiri>; https://about.att.com/sites/cyberaware/ar/lottery_scam; https://about.att.com/sites/cyberaware/ar/irs_scam.

²¹ See Letter from Vonda Long-Dillard, AT&T, to Marlene H. Dortch, FCC, CG Docket No. 17-59, at 1 (filed Sept. 22, 2017).

before a block is placed. Once the investigator is reasonably confident that a telephone number is engaged in the transmission of Prohibited Traffic (as that term is defined in the AT&T Business Service Guide), a block is put on the telephone number. The fraud team continues to review the activity so that the block can be removed once the illegal activity has ceased. While AT&T invested considerable time and expense to develop and operationalize the program, consumers receive the benefit of this call blocking program at no charge.

Additionally, AT&T was among the first to implement the *2017 Call Blocking Order* when it took effect.²² Since that time, AT&T has prevented approximately 19.8 million illegal calls from reaching its post-paid wireless customer base, including fixed and mobile wireless customers.²³

As we have explained in previous submissions, AT&T stands ready, willing, and able to target and block illegal traffic more aggressively on its network. Indeed, AT&T is eager to expand its call blocking programs for the benefit of our customers. As we have detailed in previous filings in this proceeding, the Commission should authorize broader provider-initiated call blocking consistent with the best practices developed and implemented by AT&T's fraud experts in our call blocking programs, and the Commission also should propose and adopt a safe harbor to insulate voice service providers that engage in call blocking from liability in the event the provider inadvertently blocks a legitimate call.²⁴ AT&T has proposed a framework for such a safe harbor. We would welcome your support of these proposals.

C. AT&T Is, and Will Continue To Be, a Leader in the Fight Against Illegal and Unwanted Robocalls.

Significantly, AT&T's efforts are not limited to call blocking and labeling. Far from it. We are actively engaged with industry stakeholders on a number of additional fronts in the fight against illegal and unwanted robocalls, as further described below.

SHAKEN/STIR. As detailed in our recent response to Chairman Pai on the implementation of caller ID authentication technology,²⁵ AT&T has played a leading role in the

²² See AT&T Robocall Report Comments at 9.

²³ Call block totals identified in connection with the *2017 Call Blocking Order* are distinct from, and do not include, calls blocked through AT&T Call Protect, AT&T Call Protect Plus, Digital Phone Call Protect, and AT&T's other blocking programs, discussed herein.

²⁴ See generally AT&T Robocall Record Refresh Comments; AT&T Robocall Report Comments at 9-14.

²⁵ See Letter from Joan Marsh, AT&T, to Chairman Ajit Pai, CG Docket No. 17-97 (filed Nov. 19, 2018).

development of the technical protocols known as Signature-based Handling of Asserted Information Using toKENs and the Secure Telephone Identity Revisited (“SHAKEN/STIR”). That leadership continues today as industry enters the implementation phase of SHAKEN/STIR. AT&T will be among the first in the industry with the ability to sign calls and exchange certificates with other providers. In addition, AT&T’s representative chairs the Secure Telephone Identity Governance Authority board, which is presently establishing the policy framework for the operation of SHAKEN/STIR.

Industry Traceback Process. AT&T also is proud to have worked cooperatively with industry partners to develop and implement the industry traceback process, overseen by USTelecom, which maps a call’s path through multiple networks to identify the call originator. Traceback has been an important investigative tool for law enforcement, giving investigators information they need to identify and shut down illegal robocall and scam operations, including operations located overseas. AT&T and its industry partners meet twice a month (and more frequently, as needed) to discuss current issues and solutions, including potential process and efficiency improvements to the traceback process. Participating service providers also routinely initiate numerous tracebacks themselves in an effort to build cases against bad actors perpetrating fraud among consumers that they can then share with law enforcement authorities at the Commission, FTC, FBI, and others.²⁶

Engagement with Call Originators. Looking beyond the cooperative efforts of voice service providers to combat illegal and unwanted calls, AT&T has established an ongoing and constructive dialogue with call originators to understand and, where appropriate, address concerns they have raised. AT&T is not unsympathetic to the complaints of legitimate, law abiding call originators, who have seen call answer rates decline as consumers increasingly use call blocking/labeling tools and/or simply no longer answer calls from unfamiliar telephone numbers. AT&T is committed to accuracy and will make improvements to its consumer tools where appropriate and feasible.²⁷

²⁶ AT&T would welcome—and, in fact desires—more vigorous enforcement activity. In AT&T’s view, developing cases at the industry level, coupled with enforcement action, may be the most productive way to reduce illegal robocalls at the source, as tracebacks often point to a limited number of bad actors as the perpetrators of a large number of illegal robocalls. Enhancing law enforcement resources thus has the potential to have the greatest impact in addressing the illegal robocall problem.

²⁷ At the same time, AT&T fully embraces the reality that services like AT&T Call Protect, among others, provide consumers with useful information about the calls they receive, and that many consumers simply do not want to take calls from businesses or telemarketers—even those with which the consumer has (or had) a relationship. Consumers who have subscribed to a service within the AT&T Call Protect suite value the information those

AT&T appreciates the Commission's continued attention to the scourge of illegal and unwanted calls, including this opportunity to provide an update on our efforts to provide consumers with no- and low-cost tools to combat such calls. But our work is far from complete. AT&T thus remains steadfast in its commitment to working to find new, and improve upon existing, methods of addressing this serious issue. As outlined above and detailed in our previous submissions in this proceeding, we encourage the Commission to provide voice service providers with greater flexibility to continue to attack the problem, and we look forward to working with you toward that goal.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/Joan Marsh

Joan Marsh
Chief Regulatory & State External Affairs Officer
AT&T Communications

cc (via email): The Honorable Ajit Pai
The Honorable Michael O'Rielly
The Honorable Brendan Carr

services provide, in many cases because such services enable them to avoid calls from businesses and telemarketers.