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For Immediate Release**FCC CHAIRMAN PROPOSES CALL BLOCKING BY DEFAULT TO
HELP COMBAT THE SCOURGE OF ROBOCALLS*****Expects Providers to Offer Consumers Robust, Free Call Blocking Tools
Based on Analytics & Consumer Contact Lists***

WASHINGTON, May 15, 2019—Federal Communications Commission Chairman Ajit Pai is proposing bold action to help consumers block unwanted robocalls. He has circulated a declaratory ruling that, if adopted, would allow phone companies to block unwanted calls to their customers by default. In addition, companies could allow consumers to block calls not on their own contact list. The accompanying draft Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking would propose a safe harbor for providers that implement network-wide blocking of calls that fail caller authentication under the SHAKEN/STIR framework once it is implemented.

“Allowing call blocking by default could be a big benefit for consumers who are sick and tired of robocalls. By making it clear that such call blocking is allowed, the FCC will give voice service providers the legal certainty they need to block unwanted calls from the outset so that consumers never have to get them,” said Chairman Pai. “And, if this decision is adopted, I strongly encourage carriers to begin providing these services by default—for free—to their current and future customers. I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting this latest attack on unwanted robocalls and spoofing.”

Today, many voice providers have held off developing and deploying call blocking tools by default because of uncertainty about whether these tools are legal under the FCC’s rules. Allowing default call blocking by voice providers could significantly increase development and consumer adoption of such tools. This blocking could be based on analytics and consumer “white lists.” Similar analytics are currently used by third-party developers in call blocking apps. Consumer white lists could be based on the customer’s own contact list, updated automatically as consumers add and remove contacts from their smartphones.

Chairman Pai also proposes seeking public comment on how [caller ID authentication](#) standards, known as SHAKEN/STIR, can inform call blocking. The Chairman has demanded that carriers adopt these standards to combat malicious spoofing. This system of signing calls as legitimate as they pass through the phone networks may well be useful for call blocking tools. With the expectation that such standards will be available later this year, the Chairman is proposing in a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking to create a safe harbor for calls that are blocked because they are not authenticated under the SHAKEN/STIR framework.

Today’s action would be the first by the Commission to directly combat scam robocalls that spoof legitimate, in-service numbers. This follows adoption of [new rules](#) in 2017 which allowed blocking of calls before they reach consumers when they are highly likely to be

illegitimate. These calls might appear to come from non-existent area codes or from numbers on the Do Not Originate list that do not make outbound calls—like the FCC’s own consumer help line, which was added to the list following scam calls that spoofed the agency’s 888-CALL-FCC number.

These measures will be considered by the full Commission at its June 6 Open Commission Meeting. If adopted, this ruling and any new rules would maintain strong protections against blocking of emergency calls. In addition, consumers would be allowed to opt-out of any blocking services they do not want.

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action. See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).

FACT SHEET: CHAIRMAN PAI'S NEXT STEPS IN CURBING ILLEGAL ROBOCALLS: DEFAULT CALL BLOCKING SERVICES TO PROTECT CONSUMERS

On May 15, FCC Chairman Ajit Pai proposed steps to empower voice service providers to block illegal robocalls before they reach consumers' phones. The first part is a declaratory ruling, which, if adopted at the Commission's June meeting, would allow voice service providers to provide call-blocking services by default. The second part, a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, proposes a safe-harbor for call-blocking programs targeting potentially spoofed calls while still safeguarding critical calls.

With these steps, the FCC continues its multi-pronged strategy to curb illegal robocalls.

Call Blocking for Consumers by Default

Chairman Pai is taking action to empower phone companies to block robocalls by default. Through the proposed declaratory ruling, phone companies will be permitted to detect and analyze robocalls and block them from bombarding consumers' phones—similar to the way email providers block spam. Call blocking by default is an important distinction because many voice service providers offer call-blocking programs only on an opt-in basis. And as Consumers Union put it, “so few consumers opt-in to robocall blocking tools, yet continually express their frustration with the unending barrage of nuisance of calls.” Chairman Pai's declaratory ruling would make clear that voice service providers can offer call blocking tools by default to their customers—while giving consumers the choice to opt out. If this passes on June 6, voice service providers can start offering call-blocking services by default to reduce the number of robocalls that consumers receive.

Other key points:

- Voice service providers may offer opt-out call-blocking programs based on any reasonable analytics designed to identify unwanted calls and will have flexibility on how to dispose of those calls, such as sending straight to voicemail, alerting the customer of a robocall, or blocking the call altogether.
- Providers should clearly disclose to consumers what types of calls may be blocked.
- Voice service providers must provide sufficient information so that consumers can remain in the program or opt out.
- Call blocking should not in any way interfere with our country's emergency communications systems.

More Aggressive Blocking Tools by Opting In

In addition to proactive call blocking, Chairman Pai's declaratory ruling would make clear that carriers can allow consumers to opt in to more aggressive blocking tools like those based on their own contact lists or other “white list” options. The declaratory ruling makes clear that carriers can permit consumers to use their own contact lists as a “white list,” blocking calls not included on that list. The white list could be updated automatically as consumers add and remove contacts from their smartphones.

Safe Harbor for Call-Blocking Programs Based on Potentially Spoofed Calls

The Chairman is also proposing a safe harbor for providers that implement network-wide blocking of calls that fail caller authentication under the [SHAKEN/STIR framework](#) once it is implemented. The Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking also seeks comment on whether the FCC should create a safe harbor for blocking unsigned calls for particular groups of voice service providers—such as those known to facilitate illegal robocalls. It considers requiring voice service providers to maintain a “Critical Calls List” of numbers (such as emergency numbers) they may not block. These steps would be a powerful incentive for voice service providers to adopt the SHAKEN/STIR standards. These standards are expected to be implemented by large carriers later this year.