

## **Congressman Kevin Hern OK-01**

### **Statement:**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Walden, for allowing me to testify before your committee today. I want to thank the Energy & Commerce Committee for passing H.R. 3375, the Stopping Bad Robocalls Act. This is an important piece of legislation that I proudly cosponsor and that the House of Representatives passed overwhelmingly yesterday.

We've all received spam phone calls before. They are annoying, harassing, frustrating calls during all hours of the day and night. I sometimes get as many as 20 fake phone calls per day.

These robocalls are frequently coming from your own area code – a trick that makes us all extra vulnerable to this epidemic. Con artists are manipulating the incoming phone numbers in order to gain the trust of the American people to steal money and personal information from their unsuspecting victims. It is criminal and it is long overdue that we do something about this breach of trust.

It is urgent that we shine some light on the pressing and increasingly frustrating issue of Robocalls. Currently, Robocalls make up about 50% of all phone calls. In 2018, there were more than 47 billion robocalls in the U.S., an increase of 17 billion from the previous year. And this year, according to AARP, we are on track to receive a record 60 billion illegal Robocalls.

In my home state of Oklahoma, robocalls are received over 55 million times per month, about 75,000 calls per hour. That is completely absurd.

Oklahoma's state officials are working tirelessly to solve this issue on the local level, but the scope of this abuse requires federal intervention. Therefore, I want to thank Oklahoma's Attorney General Mike Hunter, who has met with Federal Communications Commission Chairman Pai to do his part in ending the robocall epidemic in Oklahoma. For rural Oklahomans, their phone may very well be their life-line, and robocalls block the lines – putting their very lives in danger.

Additionally, the Robocall epidemic is also a public health crisis, as it is plaguing our hospitals and health care facilities' phone lines. For people with life-threatening illness and the elderly, who rely on their phone as their lifeline, these phone calls can get in the way of life-saving help.

When a person is trying to contact a hospital, every second counts. A blocked phone line due to a spam call can mean life-or-death to a patient. For example, in the heart of Boston, at Tufts Medical Center, administrators registered more than 4,500 calls within a two-hour window, just last year. Many hospitals around the country share this experience.

In Congress, I have made it a priority to uphold consumer protections. Unsolicited calls and text messages violate these protections, which is why I support the Stopping Bad Robocalls Act.

This legislation requires consumer consent to receive calls and text messages from automated dialing systems and requires those who are sending robocalls to maintain records of consent they have received from consumers. Consumers will also have the ability to withdraw consent for automated texts and calls.

This legislation also requires phone carriers to provide call authentication technology, so consumers can trust their caller ID again. It is required that this technology should not impose an additional line-item cost to a consumers' phone bill. There will also be a process to help rural carriers implement this call authentication technology.

Consumers should be able to block harassing spam phone calls without being charged extra. These harmful phone calls are defrauding our seniors and preventing our hospitals from providing timely care.

Robocalls are a serious, pervasive, and persistent problem that are causing serious issues – particularly for our hospitals, seniors, and rural populations. These unwanted and unwarranted calls are illegal, and it is our responsibility to ensure that consumers are protected from these fraudulent calls. Illegal robocalls put Americans at risk of scams and fraud. It is time that we stop this abuse and do something about robocalls.

**Conclusion:**

I ask my colleagues in the Senate to join us in putting a stop to this nuisance and prevent violation of the American consumer's right to privacy. Once again, I want to thank the Energy & Commerce Committee and the full House of Representatives for passing H.R. 3375, the Stopping Bad Robocalls Act.

Thank you for having me here today. I yield back the balance of my time.