

**Opening Statement of Republican Leader Bob Latta
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Legislating to Stop the Onslaught of Annoying Robocalls”
April 30, 2019**

As Prepared for Delivery

Good morning and welcome to our panel of witnesses. Like many of my colleagues on this subcommittee, today’s hearing addresses one of the top issues I hear about from my constituents when I am back home in Ohio. In fact, some of my constituents are getting so many unlawful robocalls that they have stopped answering their phones.

After listening to these concerns, I introduced a bill with Chairman Doyle that we will be discussing today called the Support Tools to Obliterate Pesky Robocalls Act or STOP Robocalls Act. Our bill would give us additional tools in our robocall toolbox to go after bad actors. The STOP Robocalls Act would help terminate illegal call operations by streamlining the process for private entities to share information with the Federal Communications Commission about scams, and further industry efforts to trace back the source of unwanted robocalls. In addition to going after the root of the problem, our bill would also protect consumers by providing easier access to illegal robocall blocking technology.

Our bill distinguishes between legitimate and illegitimate callers and recognizes that we need to go after the bad actors. I hope that the focus of today's hearing is also on how we need to stop illegal, unwanted robocalls. While we all get annoyed by the overwhelming number of unlawful calls we receive, we also rely on our phone system for many valuable, pro-consumer messages. Emergency personnel use voice services to provide evacuation notifications and alerts during severe weather and other dangerous situations. Schools use voice and text services to notify parents of changes in the school schedule – and although Ohio doesn't declare as many snow days as DC– parents like knowing when school is closing early or canceled. Financial services also use voice and text services to alert consumers to potentially unauthorized activity in their bank account. And, the medical community uses voice and text services to follow up with patients with important information and check-ups after operations, remind patients of prescription refills, or even to confirm doctor's appointments.

But, bad actors have also figured out how to take advantage of the phone system and technology that legitimate entities use to share important messages, and instead manipulate the technology to trick and deceive consumers. These scammers deliberately falsify their caller ID information to hoax consumers into thinking that they are getting a call from their bank or IRS, or make the call appear that it is coming from

someone in their neighborhood. This tactic, known as “neighborhood spoofing,” assumes that we are more likely to answer a phone call that appears to be local, and is a key driver behind unwanted calls and texts to both wireline and wireless phones.

Furthermore, this type of fraudulent spoofing results in real financial harm. Scammers trick consumers into answering these calls and then use deceptive tactics to convince people – often vulnerable and trusting senior citizens – to hand over their personal information or to purchase fake goods and services.

We want to make sure that we are preserving consumers’ access to desirable, and at times, life-saving calls and text messages while also protecting them from bad actors who fraudulently spoof caller ID information to make illegal robocalls. At best, Americans find these robocalls pesky, and at worst, these illegal calls scam hard-working Americans out of their life savings.

Congress, the FCC, and the FTC have made tremendous progress working with industry to help reduce the number of illegal robocalls Americans receive. Industry has also been actively working to protect consumers from unwanted robocalls by developing a set of procedures

to authenticate caller ID information associated with telephone calls to combat unlawful caller ID spoofing.

Last Congress, when I served as Chairman of the Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection subcommittee, we held a hearing on the options and strategies that the government and industry were employing to fight robocalls and caller ID spoofing and provide consumers with tools to protect themselves. We learned of tools available to empower consumers and discussed how consumer education was key in helping to prevent people from falling victim.

However, as technology continues to evolve, so do the tactics that bad actors use to illegally spoof numbers and make fraudulent robocalls. Despite our progress thus far, more work remains to be done to protect American consumers. I am glad we are discussing several legislative proposals today that would do just that.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses, and I thank the Chairman for working with me on the STOP Robocalls Act and for holding today's hearing. With that I yield back.