

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI**

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

A week and a half ago, I got an email from Mr. Duncan Weddington of Winchester, Tennessee. This is what he wrote: “Will you please start an initiative to stop invasive nuisance robocalls[?] We have received 5 already today and the day is not over. Please help. I am 80 years old and would like to spend my remaining time on God’s good earth without these consistent unwanted calls.”

A few days after that, I got an email from Ms. Florence Friedman of New York City. She had first complained to the FCC two years ago, saying the number of robocalls she got was “maddening.” As she put it then, “[T]hese calls come in from a wide range of phone numbers from a wide range of cities. I’m sure if I reported a specific number you wouldn’t find anyone at that number. . . . This is the wild west, an area of lawlessness. It is the FCC’s job to find a solution. Please do it fast.” She forwarded that email to me last Friday, adding “As you can see, this is an old problem, one which persists and has gotten worse. Can’t you do something? . . . Hopefully, you will put this high on your agenda. It really is disruptive to one’s life. . . . We deserve peace and quiet—and yes, even security. Please do something!”

There are millions of Americans as fed up by illegal robocalls as Duncan Weddington and Florence Friedman. I count myself as one of them.

Robocalls are the number one consumer complaint to the FCC from the public. And it’s no wonder: Every month, U.S. consumers are bombarded by an estimated 2.4 billion robocalls. Not only are unwanted robocalls intrusive and irritating, but they are also frequently employed to scam our most vulnerable populations, like elderly Americans, out of their hard-earned dollars.

This must change. And starting today, we lay the foundation for changing it.

In this Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, we aim to take an important first step in ending the scourge of illegal robocalls. In particular, we propose to authorize providers to block calls purporting to originate from unassigned or invalid numbers. These are numbers that are either unassigned under the North American Numbering Plan; not allocated to a phone company; or not assigned to a subscriber. In each case, there is no legitimate reason for anyone to spoof such a number. By allowing providers to block calls from unassigned numbers, we can help stop scammers.

Next, we codify guidance provided by the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau in 2016 that providers may block calls when the subscriber to a particular telephone number requests that calls purporting to originate from that number be blocked. By formalizing this safe harbor we give certainty to voice service providers that will allow them to block plainly illegitimate calls, and we empower subscribers of spoofed numbers to take action to protect themselves and their numbers.

Finally, we seek input on other objective criteria to identify illegal robocalls—criteria that could help us distinguish, for example, between a woman at a domestic violence shelter legitimately using Caller ID spoofing to check on her kids at home and a foreign huckster pretending to call from the Internal Revenue Service. That’s because we know the problem of illegal robocalls is complicated and the solutions are many—and today’s proposals are only the Commission’s first step toward defeating this scourge.

I’d like to thank John B. Adams, Jerusha Burnett, Micah Caldwell, Alison Kutler, Kurt Schroeder, and Mark Stone from the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau; Jeff Gee, Rick

Hindman, and Kristi Thompson from the Enforcement Bureau; Billy Layton and Rick Mallen from the Office of General Counsel; Henning Schulzrinne and Antonio Sweet from the Office of Strategic Policy and Planning; and Adam Copeland, Kristine Fargotstein, Dan Kahn, and Nirali Patel from the Wireline Competition Bureau for their hard work on this Notice of Proposed Rulemaking and Notice of Inquiry and their continued dedication and service to the public.

Oh, and Mr. Weddington: May your remaining time on God's good earth be ample, and free from robocalls. And Ms. Friedman: I won't stop until you can finally enjoy some peace and quiet.