

Federation Resolution
on
Unwanted and Criminal Robocalls

Approved by the Federation Membership
Mm dd, 2019

Support for Additional Measures to Stop Unwanted and Criminal Robocalls

Background

Unwanted Robocalls are a nuisance as well as a source of criminal efforts to scam vulnerable older adults.

In the 116th U.S. Congress, 24 separate bills have been introduced (but not passed into law) that focus on reducing illegal robocalls. These include Stopping Bad Robocalls Act (HR 946) to stop abusive robocall practices. <https://bit.ly/2Sx11yK> and the Telephone Robocall Abuse Criminal Enforcement and Deterrence (TRACED) Act (S. 151). The later bill would require service providers to adopt technology to authenticate phone calls before they reach consumers' phones and charges the FCC with implementing more rules around consumer protection. <https://bit.ly/2EmPTQe>

Several telecommunication and technology companies offer customers various approaches to blocking robocalls, but the options may not apply to all types of robocalls and phone types, may cost money, may have limited effectiveness, or may require consumers to take actions to opt in to use the service.

WHEREAS: Financial scams are a common problem, affecting approximately 1 of every 18 cognitively intact, community-dwelling older adults each year in the U.S.. Many of these crimes are perpetrated through robocalls. In 2018, Virginia had the 7th highest complaint rate to the National Do Not Call Registry;

WHEREAS: The National Do Not Call Registry has not been effective in protecting consumers from law-breakers and overseas scammers;

WHEREAS: Fairfax County has implemented an educational initiative to help reduce scams targeting older adults called Silver Shield; These efforts focus on alerting consumers to different types of scams, such as the grandchild scam, the IRS scam, and the social security scam.

WHEREAS: The Fairfax County Police Department is seeking to expand their efforts to catch and prosecute local perpetrators of elder scams, but have little recourse against most phone related scams;

WHEREAS: The Commonwealth of Virginia has a law prohibiting robocalls but does not enforce the law because many of the criminals reside outside the state; Virginia passed legislation this year that will allow citizens with registered numbers on the Do Not Call Registry to sue businesses that violate the Federal Statute. However, for vulnerable older adults, preventing unwanted telemarketing and robocalls can be a more effective remedy.

WHEREAS: Some telecommunications companies are charging consumers for services (such as caller ID) that could help customers avoid scams and block some robocalls

WHEREAS: Several technological solutions that block or identify robocalls are either currently available or may be implemented in the future by telecommunications companies;

WHEREAS: A recent Consumer Report survey found that only 16% of adults use a free robocall blocking service. Many of these are older adults who are unaware of the various methods and technologies they can employ to block robocalls and how to implement them because of the numerous and complicated options that may be available, depending on what type of phone and service provider they use;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Fairfax Federation of Citizens Associations requests that the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors:

1. Urge our State legislators to require telecommunication companies operating in Virginia to implement Robocall Blocking and Scam ID technologies at no cost to consumers if Federal Laws do not pre-empt state laws on this issue.
2. Continue to support Fairfax Police and Fairfax Silver Shield Task Force anti scam efforts against vulnerable older adults.
3. Supplement the Silver Shield campaign (e.g., using trained volunteers, senior center tech instructors, meals on wheels volunteers, volunteer drivers, or high school students doing community service) to initiate efforts that proactively inform and assist vulnerable older adults to implement technological solutions on their mobile and land lines that can help identify and block unwanted and criminal telemarketing and robocalls.