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House Energy, Utilities, & Telecommunications Committee
Chairman Joe Seiwert
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INFORMATIONAL HEARING
ROBOCALLS – SPOOFING

Chairman Seiwert and Members of the Committee:

My name is Eli Veenendaal, and I am Verizon’s Director for State & Local Government Affairs in the region, including Kansas. I am pleased to provide information to the committee on Verizon’s efforts to combat and block illegal and unwanted robocalls.

Verizon understands robocalls are aggravating and sometimes intimidating to our customers and employees. In response, Verizon supported federal legislation to outlaw spoofing and shut down illegal robocalls. For example, Verizon supported the recently enacted TRACED Act that, among other things, strengthens enforcement against illegal robocalls and requires service providers to implement the STIR/SHAKEN call authentication technology.

More specifically, the STIR/SHAKEN technology screens incoming calls to verify that the number showing is actually coming from the originating location. Verizon is already using STIR/SHAKEN to authenticate customers from calls within Verizon’s network, and over the coming months, they’ll deploy it for interconnections from all of the other major carriers. We are also leveraging various tools that identify unwanted and illegal calls with a high degree of precision and certainty, to provide our customers with industry-leading anti-robocall protections, including the STIR/SHAKEN call authentication technology and our extensive “honeypot” program. The data collected by our honeypots include not only basic information about the calls (e.g., calling party number time, duration) but also metadata associated with IP calls and recorded voicemails that we transcribe and analyze. This honeypot program helps us identify and categorize mass calling campaigns with a high degree of certainty.

Verizon also offers free Call Filter technology, and we are auto-enrolling millions of customers each week. For customers whose device manufacturer may not allow pre-installed features, a customer may opt-in to Call Filter to help identify spam and block robocalls. Verizon’s Call Filter application can both detect and filter spam, and allow customers to report numbers for free.

On the wireline side, Verizon deployed its free Spam Alerts robocall labeling service to provide meaningful robocall protections to wireline customers served by all types of technology (copper as well as fiber). The service is available at no additional charge to all landline voice customers with Caller ID, and it displays “SPAM?” before a caller’s name if the calling number matches certain criteria designed to identify likely spam.

Under the FCC’s 2017 blocking order, Verizon has blocked hundreds of millions of calls falling into the categories that carriers are authorized to block (i.e., calls coming from invalid numbers, from numbers that are unallocated or not assigned

to any subscriber, and where we are authorized by the person assigned a number to block calls from that number). Verizon is continuing to increase our accuracy and sophistication along with the volume of network-level blocking over time, in partnership with our analytics partners, and vendors. We are also working with Public Safety Answering Points and 9-1-1 associations to ensure that no critical calls are blocked.

Verizon also acknowledges there is a false-positive risk for enterprise callers and legitimate auto-dialed calls. Through Verizon's voice spam feedback website, we invite legitimate calling parties and consumers to inform us about calls that they believe are treated incorrectly by our spam filtering—both calls incorrectly identified as spam and ones that should have been identified as spam but were not. We permit calling parties to tell us about their operations (such as the numbers they use and the nature of their calling campaigns), even if they are not aware of any issues with our labeling or blocking, so that the third-party vendor that analyzes traffic for Verizon's blocking/labeling tools can take that information into account. Verizon also educates calling parties about "best practices" and about the sorts of calling activities that can result in their calls being identified as spam, so that they have the opportunity to adjust their operations in order to avoid becoming caught up in Verizon's or other parties' blocking or labeling tools.

In addition to these technologies, Verizon has supported and encouraged efforts by the State attorneys general to develop a set of industry best-practices resulting in the Anti-Robocall Principles adopted by 51 State Attorneys General. Verizon is dedicated to implementing all of the AGs Anti-Robocall Principles, and is also working within industry to effectively prosecute those responsible for illegal robocalls as a founding member of the US Telecom Industry Traceback Group. This Group is an industry-led trace back consortium that traces suspicious robocall traffic to its origination (whenever possible), stops many illegal robocalls by implementing industry-wide Do-Not-Originate lists, and helps law enforcement agencies catch the originating callers and complicit voice service providers who facilitate entry of much this illegal and unwanted traffic into the United States.

Verizon also has a robust "know your customer" program that analyzes traffic from both wholesale and retail customers on IP platforms to identify patterns associated with potentially illegal robocalling. Verizon has developed a set of "best practices" that define and set measurable objectives for characteristics associated with suspicious robocalling, which we have shared with our wholesale customers, and others in the industry. We are also taking other actions to keep robocalls off our networks, such as pressing other service providers that send us traffic to adhere to basic, common-sense measures to make sure their traffic is not illegal. For example, Verizon has a program for requiring its existing wholesale customer base to sign a contract amendment committing them to participate in industry traceback and to implement similar agreements with their upstream customers.

As you can see, Verizon continues to invest heavily in increasing our flows of STIR/SHAKEN traffic and to advance the standards and best practices in ways that maximize benefits to our customers.

Verizon thanks the committee for its strong commitment to addressing this important issue. Please know that Verizon fully appreciates the harm caused by robocalls and we are committed to continuing to work on multiple fronts to better protect our customers.