



September 9, 2014

MADIGAN URGES FCC TO ALLOW PHONE COMPANIES TO BLOCK ROBOCALLS

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan today called on the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to issue an opinion on whether phone companies can legally implement call-blocking technologies to better protect phone customers from unwanted calls and scams, otherwise known as “robocalls.”

Call-blocking technologies, such as NoMoRobo, Call Control and Telemarketing Guard, allow phone carriers to identify and block unwelcome sales calls at a customer’s request. However, some phone carriers have not implemented this technology in part due to a federal law that they believe prevents them from blocking calls on a customer’s behalf.

Despite coordinated efforts by Madigan’s office, other state attorneys general and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), Illinois residents continue to report robocalls to their homes, even when residents have placed their numbers on the FTC’s “Do Not Call” registry. The calls frequently originate from scammers in foreign countries, using technology to hide their location and identity, which makes enforcement efforts against them difficult.

Phone carriers have expressed concern that the FCC’s legal framework prohibits them from determining which calls should be allowed to go through to a customer and which should be blocked. Last year, in explaining the obstacles that phone carriers face in implementing call-blocking technologies, US Telecom wrote to the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Protection, Product Safety, and Insurance that “the FCC has concluded that call blocking is an unjust and unreasonable practice under section 201(b) of the Communications Act of 1934.”

In a letter to the FCC today, Madigan and 38 other attorneys general sought a formal opinion from the FCC on whether an exception can be made to allow companies to block illegal telemarketing calls at the request of a customer.

“Robocalls are a growing problem in Illinois and across the country,” Madigan said. “It is imperative that we use every tool available to put a stop to these annoying and unwanted calls.”

Madigan’s letter is her latest step to address the growing problem of robocalls targeting Illinois residents. Previously, the Attorney General called on four leading U.S. phone carriers to implement the call-blocking technology that is being legally questioned before the FCC today.

And in 2011, she led an effort to defeat federal legislation that would allow phone carriers to place automated robocalls on cell phones and force customers to pay for the unwanted calls.

While the FCC matter is pending, Madigan said the best step Illinois residents can take to better protect themselves from unwanted calls is to sign up for the FTC’s Do Not Call registry. To register, visit <https://donotcall.gov/register/reg.aspx> or call 1-888-382-1222 (TTY: 1-866-290-4236).

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