South Carolina
DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS
293 GREYSTONE BOULEVARD, STE. 400
P. O. BOX 5757
COLUMBIA, SC 29250-5757

Carri Grube Lybarker
Administrator/
Consumer Advocate

PROTECTING CONSUMERS SINCE 1975

July 9, 2021

Via Electronic Submission
Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
WC Docket No. 17-97
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

**RE: Call Authentication Trust Anchor
WC Docket No. 17-97**

Dear Secretary Dortch:

The South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs ("SCDCA"/"Department") is pleased to offer comments in response to the Federal Communications Commission's ("FCC"/"Commission") proposed rule to shorten by one year the STIR/SHAKEN implementation extension for small voice service providers that originate an especially large number of calls.

SCDCA is the state's consumer protection agency. Established in 1974, SCDCA is responsible for the administration and enforcement of over 120 state and federal laws. A large part of our authority stems from Title 37 of the South Carolina Code of Laws, the Consumer Protection Code, of which the South Carolina Telephone Privacy Protection Act[1] is a part. The agency also has responsibility over the statute specifically placing limitations on telephone solicitations and calls made with automatically dialed announcing devices.[2]

SCDCA helps formulate and modify consumer laws, policies, and regulations; resolves complaints arising out of the production, promotion, or sale of consumer goods or services in South Carolina, whether or not credit is involved; and promotes a healthy competitive business climate with mutual confidence between buyers and sellers. Overall, SCDCA protects consumers while giving due regard to those businesses acting in a fair and honest manner.

In 2012, the South Carolina General Assembly funded the Identity Theft Unit ("Unit"). The Unit assists victims of identity theft and persons affected by security breaches, and provides identity theft-related education and outreach to consumers in South Carolina. The Unit also

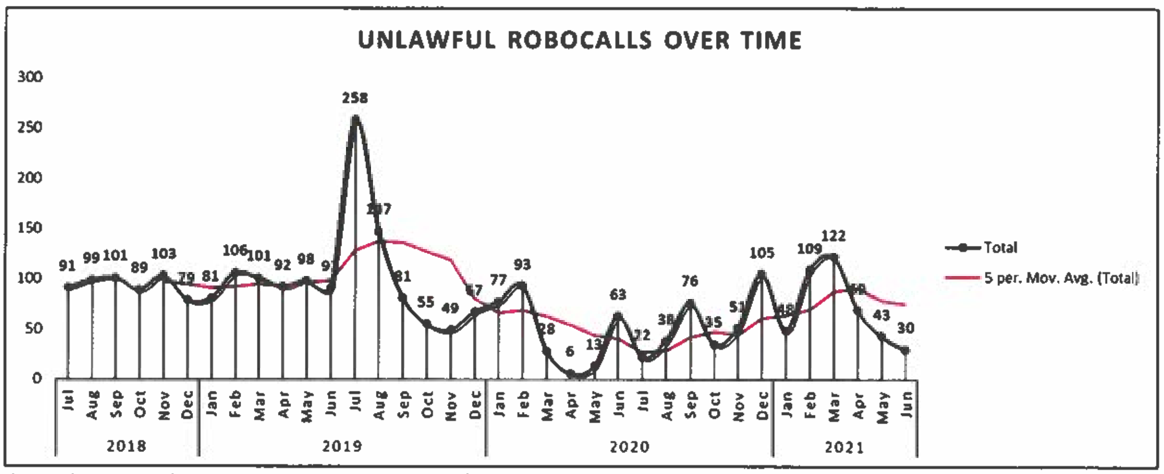
[1] *S.C. Code Ann.* § 37-21-10 *et seq.*, the South Carolina Telephone Privacy Protection Act.
[2] *S.C. Code Ann.* § 16-17-446.

processes scam reports, as the main goal of a scammer is often to separate consumers from their personal identifying information or financial resources.

SCDCA supports the proposed rule and offers for the FCC's consideration the following comments regarding trends in illegal robocalls affecting South Carolina consumers, and the benefits to those consumers of early implementation. These comments are based upon SCDCA's experience in administering and enforcing telecommunications statutes, processing consumer complaints and scam reports and assisting South Carolina consumers in mitigating identity theft.

Discussion

The Unit received reports of 2,816 scam calls between July 2018 and June 2021.[3] From July 2018 to December 2018, the Unit received reports of 562 scam calls. In 2019, the Unit received reports of 1,226 scam calls. In 2020, the Unit received reports of 607 scam calls, markedly lower. To-date in 2021, the Unit has received reports of 607 calls, on track to finish the year with levels seen in 2019.



**In July 2019, the Unit received a report of 100 phone calls over the previous three years in which the consumer gave a scammer $65,300 as part of a lottery, prize, or sweepstake scam.*

As shown in the above chart, trends in the number of illegal robocalls reported to the Unit declined during the COVID-19 pandemic's global economic shutdown, but have since grown back towards pre-existing levels. Despite the implementation of STIR/SHAKEN by larger service providers in 2019 and 2020,[4] it appears illegal robocallers have not been averted.

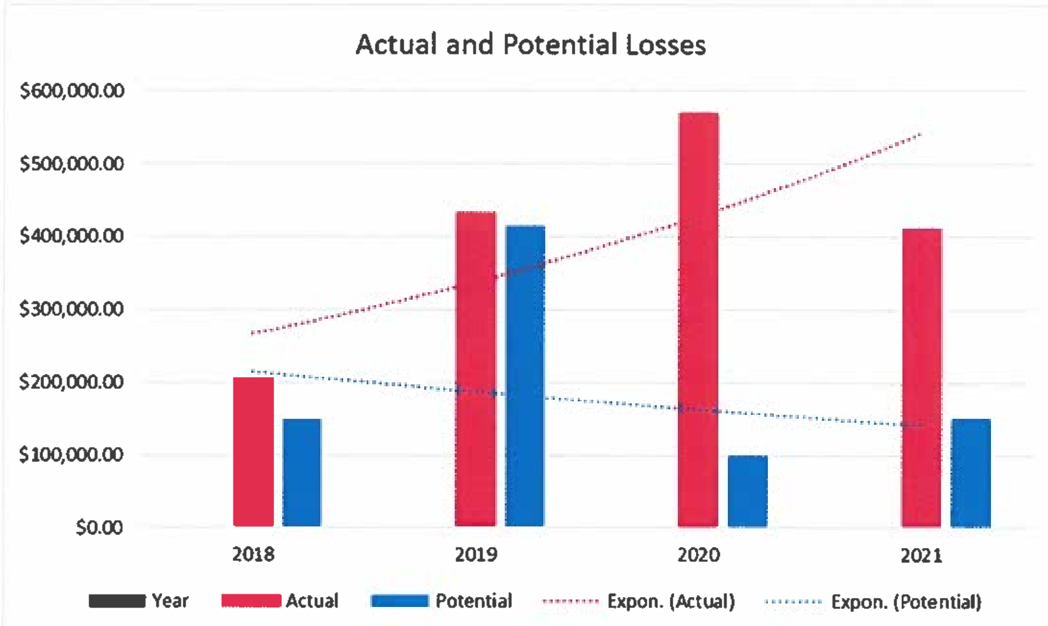
The trend of monetary losses reported by consumers receiving unsolicited calls, comprised of potential and actual losses, also supports earlier STIR/SHAKEN implementation by the subset

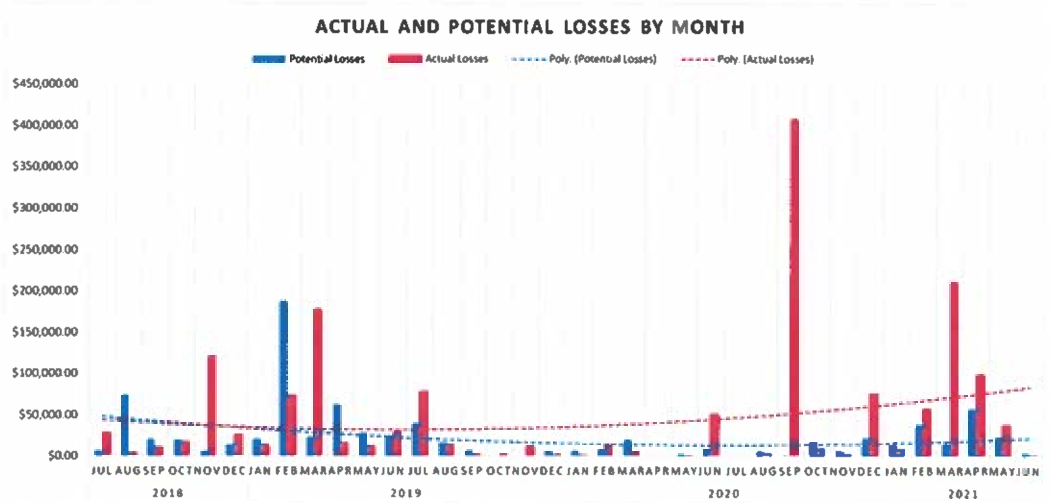
---

[3] This includes all records with the contact method of "Phone" with spoof data included. Some reports are of multiple calls.

[4] *See* Federal Communications Commission, Report to Congress on Caller ID Authentication Implementation Progress (December 29, 2020), Pp. 7-10.

of small service providers.[5] From July 2018 to December 2018, the Unit received reports of $205,486 in actual losses (*i.e.*, money paid by the consumer), and $149,205 in potential losses (*i.e.*, money requested, but not paid) to scam callers. In 2019, the Unit received reports of $432,670 in actual losses, and $415,235 in potential losses to scam callers. In 2020, the Unit received reports of $569,509 in actual losses, and $99,824 in potential losses to scam callers. To-date in 2021, the Unit has received reports of $412,702 in actual losses, and $151,108 in potential losses to scam callers, on track to finish the year with the highest actual losses ever reported, and second highest potential losses ever reported.[6]





---

[5] The Commission states in the Federal Register, page 30574, Paragraph 16 that it estimated the benefits of STIR/SHAKEN implementation would exceed $13.5 billion per year.

[6] Roughly estimated by doubling the current actual and potential losses, as the data comprises roughly half the 2021 calendar year.

Based on SCDCA's experience in processing scam reports, typically, the higher the number of unwanted calls received, the higher the losses suffered by South Carolina consumers; therefore, SCDCA supports the proposed rule. The Department agrees that by requiring small voice service providers that originate an especially large number of illegal robocalls to implement the STIR/SHAKEN framework sooner, the FCC's proposed rule will reduce the number of these calls and associated losses.

In addition to formal scam reports related to telephone scams, the Department receives many informal complaints regarding the shear annoyance felt by consumers receiving daily barrages of unsolicited and likely illegally spoofed calls. Such complaints, coupled with uncertainty of the outcome of current legal challenges to the state's anti-spoofing statute, further aid in SCDCA's support of early implementation to suppress the plethora of unscrupulous persons utilizing the telephone as a tool to perpetuate illegal activities.

Conclusion

The FCC's proposed rule offers enhanced consumer protection while posing little risk to the quality of service provided. SCDCA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed rule on Call Authentication Trust Anchor. We commend the Commission for the work and effort put into this process.

SCDCA hopes you find the information we provided beneficial as you decide a path forward for this proposed rule. Should you have any questions pertaining to our comments, please feel free to contact me at 803-734-4233.

Best Regards,

Carri Grube Lybarker

Carri Grube Lybarker, Esq.