

May 1, 2024

Marlene Dortch, Secretary
 Federal Communications Commission
 45 L St. NE
 Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: Enforcement Bureau Requests Information on the Status of Private-Led Traceback Efforts of Suspected Unlawful Robocalls, EB Docket No. 20-195, DA 24-277

Dear Ms. Dortch:

The Industry Traceback Group (ITG)¹ is pleased to submit information for the Federal Communications Commission’s (Commission’s) annual report to Congress on the state of private-led efforts to trace back the origin of suspected unlawful robocalls. This letter incorporates by reference and supplements the ITG’s submission in November 2023, given the substantial overlap in the relevant reporting periods.² The chart below provides key metrics on the state of private-led efforts to trace back suspected unlawful robocalls for 2023, as compared to 2022 and all time since the launch of the ITG’s portal through the end of 2023.

The State of Private-Led Efforts to Trace Back Suspected Unlawful Robocalls – Key Metrics

	2022	2023	All Time
Tracebacks of Suspected Unlawful Robocalls ³	3,392	3,737	13,424
Total Providers Identified	669	699	1,444
New Providers Identified	292	270	N/A
Non-Responsive Providers ⁴	104	94	382
Percent of Completed Tracebacks with Caller Warned or Terminated	67%	85%	76% ⁵
Average Hops Per Traceback	5.9	5.9	5.7
Investigative Demands/Subpoenas Received	133	198	472

¹ The ITG, a collaborative effort of companies across the wireline, wireless, VoIP and cable industries actively working to trace and identify the source of illegal robocalls, is led by USTelecom – The Broadband Association.

² See Letter from Joshua M. Bercu and Jessica Thompson, Industry Traceback Group, EB Docket No. 20-195, DA 23-639 (filed Nov. 13, 2023) (providing information for Jan. 2023 to Nov. 2023); Public Notice, *Enforcement Bureau Requests Information of the Status of Private-Led Traceback Efforts of Suspected Unlawful Robocalls*, EB Docket No. 20-195, DA 24-277 (rel. Mar. 20, 2024) (seeking information for Jan. 2023 to Dec. 2023).

³ Tracebacks rely on a sample suspected unlawful robocalls, meaning that tracebacks collectively represent the millions or billions of such calls targeting consumers.

⁴ For purposes of this submission, this figure includes providers that have not responded to three or more tracebacks in the relevant period.

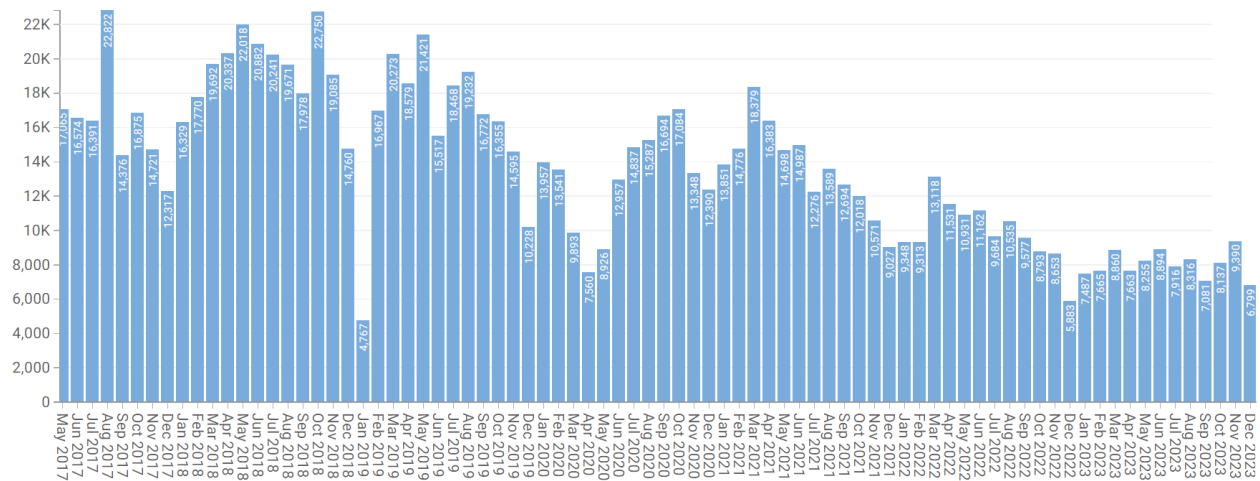
⁵ The ITG began collecting structured data in tracebacks about the action taken by the originating provider in late 2021, and therefore this figure is based on data starting from that point in time.

The ITG’s private-led traceback efforts continue to help advance the mission to curb illegal robocalls, and the combination of traceback and enforcement are having a persistent impact in the United States. According to YouMail, scam robocall volumes have dropped more than 80 percent in the last three years. Specifically, scam robocall volumes have decreased from a high of approximately 2.5 billion per month in February 2021 to less than 500 million per month in January 2024:

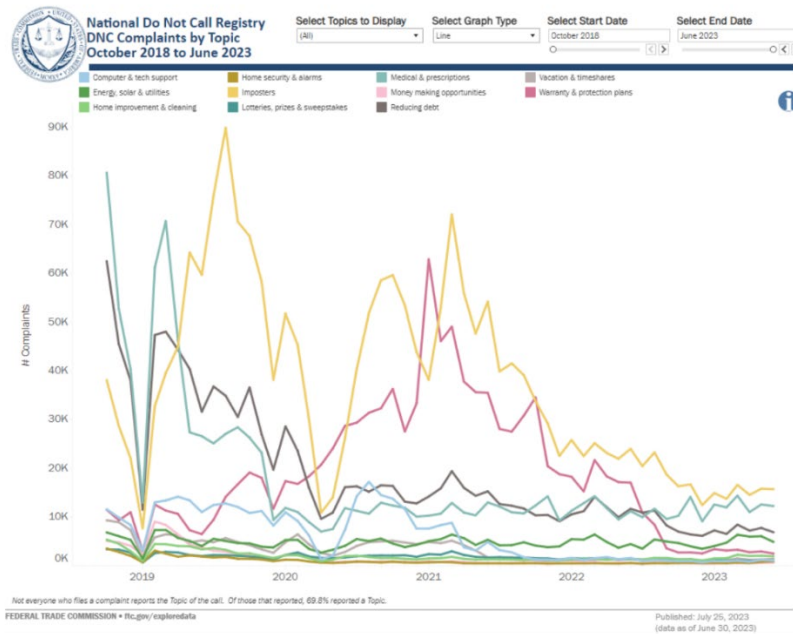


Source: YouMail

Consumers in the United States are noticing the difference, as evidenced by the Commission’s complaint data and that of the Federal Trade Commission.



Source: FCC Open Data



Source: FTC Explore Data

Despite this progress, the ITG remains vigilant and ready to adapt traceback private-led traceback efforts to combat illegal callers’ latest tactics. Many originators of suspected unlawful robocalls historically have appeared to be VoIP providers,⁶ likely because of the lower rates they generally charge.⁷ This remains the case in most tracebacks, although the ITG recently has identified some instances in which suspected unlawful robocalls originate from mobile networks, presumably relying on SIM boxes, and is working with ITG members to further investigate such calls. It’s the ITG’s understanding that making calls in this manner is a more expensive method, perhaps indicating that the actors behind such calls have shifted in light of increased difficulty getting their calls through to consumers.

The ITG also has identified an emerging and growing trend of originating providers identified as being based in the United States, rather than abroad.⁸ A disproportionate number of such providers are incorporated in the state of Wyoming relative to the state’s population. In addition, of tracebacks that end non-responsive, Wyoming-registered providers are the most frequent final non-responsive provider, as well as the most frequent provider immediately downstream of a non-responsive provider. For tracebacks in which they are identified as the originating provider, they are also identified as the signer in only 6 percent of such calls.

As the deployment of STIR/SHAKEN has made it harder to successfully spoof unlawful robocalls, the ITG continues to see evidence that many robocallers appear to have shifted from spoofing to rotating

⁶ The ITG, however, does not collect specific information that indicates whether or not a provider is a VoIP provider.

⁷ See FCC Report to Congress on Robocalls and Transmission of Misleading or Inaccurate Caller Identification Information, Dec. 27, 2023, at 15, available at <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-399306A1.pdf>.

⁸ The ITG relies on certifications made to the FCC in the Robocall Mitigation Database (RMD) to determine if a provider is U.S.-based and does not have a process or mechanism to validate if any provider is in fact based domestically.

through real numbers. To address this challenge, the ITG has called for the formal establishment in law of a number trace mechanism to investigate how bad actors get access to thousands of numbers they rotated through.⁹

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Private-led traceback efforts, in combination with the Commission's and its federal and state counterparts' regulatory and enforcement efforts, have proven impactful to curb the scourge of illegal robocalls and protect users of the phone network. The ITG stands ready to build on this success and work with the Commission and other government and industry stakeholders to continue to enhance private-led traceback efforts and adapt them to a changing threat landscape.

Please contact the undersigned if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

/s/ Joshua M. Bercu/

Joshua M. Bercu
Executive Director
Industry Traceback Group

Jessica Thompson
Director of Traceback Operations
Industry Traceback Group

⁹ Prepared Testimony of Joshua M. Bercu, Executive Director of ITG and Vice President, Policy & Advocacy of USTelecom, Hearing on Protecting Americans from Robocalls, Before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation, Subcommittee on Communications, Media, and Broadband, Oct. 24, 2023, at 8, *available at* <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/services/files/9E0BFEOC-E920-4C89-BE35-B2A4A8396181>; *see also* Notice of Ex Parte Presentation of USTelecom – The Broadband Association, CG Docket No. 17-59, CG Docket No. 23-362, WC Docket No. 13-97, WC Docket No. 07-243, WC Docket No. 20-67, IB Docket No. 16-155, at 2 (filed Jan. 31, 2024).