

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 29, 2019

The Honorable Nancy Berryhill
Acting Commissioner
Social Security Administration
1905 9th Street NE
Washington, DC 20018

The Honorable Joseph Simons
Chairman
Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20580

Dear SSA Acting Commissioner Berryhill and FTC Chairman Simons

I am writing to express alarm about the recent uptick in bad actors impersonating Social Security Administration (SSA) officials and to request information on what steps are being taken to address these scams. These unsolicited robocalls are not just an inconvenience to consumers, they are targeted attacks intended to collect personal information for monetary gain.

Earlier this year, I received an automated call impersonating an official from the SSA in which the caller claimed to suspend my Social Security Number (SSN) on an “immediate basis” because they received suspicious information. The message also claimed that if they did not hear back from me, an arrest warrant under my name would be issued, and I was instructed to call back to settle the case.

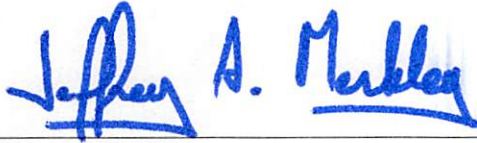
In December 2018, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) published a blog post on its website regarding “Fake calls about your SSN.” The post highlighted how these calls are a scam and that the SSA will never call to ask for your Social Security Number. However, another blog post later the same month emphasized that this was a growing problem with more than 35,000 people reporting this scam and that they lost \$10 million in 2018 compared with only 3,200 losing only \$210,000 in 2017. It is clear that these calls are continuing and are more than a mere nuisance – they are costing American families millions.

While seniors in particular are frequent targets of fraudulent calls, 5.1 billion robocalls were made to Americans in October 2018 alone, impersonations of government agencies like SSA are particularly insidious. Every call a consumer receives in which the caller pretends to be a government official will make consumers question the legitimacy of authentic communication from government agencies, including the SSA.

Unsolicited calls like the one I received endanger the financial security and right to privacy of millions of Americans, as well as the ability of agencies like SSA to effectively discharge their missions. I request that the SSA and the FTC share what actions are being taken to limit robocall scams in general, and specifically to address robocalls impersonating federal agencies. Further, what steps is SSA taking to educate Social Security recipients about how the agency will

communicate with them and how to spot fraudulent communications? Is the FTC working with other government agencies to share common scams and recommend such educational strategies?

I look forward to working with you to protect consumers from these fraudulent calls and respectfully request a reply within 30 days.



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Cc: FCC Chair Ajit Pai and U.S. Attorney General Barr

The Honorable Ajit Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
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Washington, DC 20554

The Honorable William Barr
Attorney General
Department of Justice
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