

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 9, 2019

The Honorable Ajit Pai  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
445 12th Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

We write to express our concern regarding the growing number of Americans who fall victim to cellphone account fraud—also known as subscriber fraud or SIM card cloning fraud—and to inquire about what steps the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) can take to better protect and educate consumers.

Cellphone account fraud—in which scammers either open up a cellphone account in a consumer's name or illegally clone the consumer's phone in order to control their messages and data<sup>1</sup>—is growing rapidly and is difficult to detect. In 2018, there were reportedly 680,000 victims, a 78% increase from 2017, many of whom are unaware that they have been targeted by scammers until they are contacted by debt collectors, implicated in a crime, or their bank accounts are drained.<sup>2</sup>

Consumer protection is a core responsibility of the FCC. While we recognize that consumers can take steps to better protect themselves from this fraud by securing their cellphone account with a pin number through their wireless provider or freezing their credit reports at the National Consumer Telecom and Utilities Exchange, consumers cannot protect themselves from dangers they do not know about and these measures are not foolproof. The FCC offers virtually no information to consumers about how to prevent this type of fraud or information about how to seek recourse if they are targeted.<sup>3</sup>

Given the seriousness of this issue and its growing prevalence, we urge the FCC to take action to better educate consumers about cellphone fraud and assist victims in understanding their recourse options. Accordingly, we respectfully request that you respond to the following questions:

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<sup>1</sup> NBC News. How hackers are hijacking your cellphone account. (Online at <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/consumer/how-hackers-are-hijacking-your-cell-phone-account-n859986>) (Accessed June 28, 2019); Motherboard. Someone Hacked My T-Mobile Account and T-Mobile Won't Talk About It. (Online at [https://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/neax4q/someone-hacked-my-t-mobile-account-and-t-mobile-wont-talk-about-it](https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/neax4q/someone-hacked-my-t-mobile-account-and-t-mobile-wont-talk-about-it)) (Accessed July 22, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> Consumer Reports. A Growing Threat to Your Finances: Cell-Phone Account Fraud. (Online at <https://www.consumerreports.org/scams-fraud/cell-phone-account-fraud/>) (Accessed June 28, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Federal Communications Commission. Cell Phone Fraud. (Online at <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/cell-phone-fraud>) (Accessed June 28, 2019).

- (1) What efforts is the FCC currently undertaking to educate consumers about cellphone account fraud and available methods to protect themselves?
- (2) Will the FCC commit to working with cellphone providers to develop measures to ensure that all customer accounts are protected?
- (3) What additional resources and authorities does the FCC need in order to better protect consumers from cellphone account fraud and educate them on how to prevent it?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



Tina Smith  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



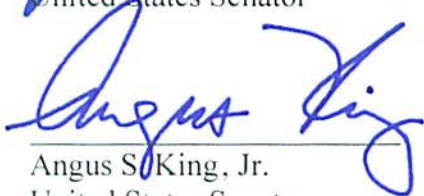
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Jon Tester  
United States Senator



Margaret Wood Hassan  
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator