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United States Senate

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6400

(202) 224-5364

December 9, 2019

The Honorable Joseph J. Simons
Chairman
Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Chairman Simons:

We write to express our concern about the Social Security scam affecting older Americans in Maine and Pennsylvania, and across the country. The criminals perpetrating this scam target Americans with millions of robocalls, often faking a call's identifying information to impersonate the Social Security Administration (SSA) and trick people into acceding to their demands. We urge the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to take all available actions to combat this pernicious scam.

As the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, we are committed to stopping scammers who seek to defraud older Americans and their families. The FTC's own data show that the Social Security scam now tops the list of most-reported scams. This aligns with data collected so far this year by the Aging Committee's Fraud Hotline, where the Social Security scam has accounted for more than twice as many complaints as any other scam. FTC data also suggest that this scam contributed to an increase in median financial losses reported by those ages 60-79 in 2018, compared to median losses reported in 2017.

To better understand the FTC's response to the Social Security scam, we request that the FTC provide the Committee with a staff briefing on the FTC's efforts to-date by December 20. Additionally, please provide the Committee with answers to the following questions no later than December 30.

1. What actions has the FTC taken over the past calendar year, including efforts to develop new information as part of the "Operation Call it Quits" initiative, to educate the public about illegal robocalls and spoofing? Have any of these efforts included information about the Social Security scam?
2. What specific steps has the FTC taken to ensure its consumer education efforts reach older Americans, who are often targeted by scammers? Have any of these outreach efforts included information about the Social Security scam?
3. What steps is the FTC taking to reach Americans living in rural areas where individuals may not have access to computers and high-speed internet? Which, if any, of these efforts included information about the Social Security scam?

4. What other actions, if any, has the FTC taken to raise public awareness about the Social Security scam?
5. The FTC's October 2019 report to Congress mentions the FTC's direct engagement with older consumers who reported losing money to FTC impersonators. What insights did the FTC gain from these direct consumer conversations that may also be applicable to the Social Security scam?
6. According to the FTC's October 2019 report to Congress, phone calls were the top fraud contact method reported by older Americans, and this high rate of telephone fraud reporting was driven largely by reports of government imposters, especially the SSA impostor scam. In light of these facts, what investigative and enforcement actions has the FTC taken to address the sharp uptick in robocalls and spoofing from Social Security impostors attempting to defraud seniors?
7. What activities has the FTC conducted, or participated in, through the Elder Justice Coordinating Council (EJCC) to address scams targeting seniors? What further support could the FTC provide to the EJCC to strengthen the federal response to scams targeting older Americans?
8. What has the FTC learned about the Social Security scam from monitoring and analyzing Consumer Sentinel data? How is the FTC using these insights to inform its strategies for responding to the Social Security scam?
9. What other initiatives or approaches has the FTC considered or implemented to protect consumers, especially seniors, from the Social Security scam?
10. Has the FTC encountered any barriers in its efforts to educate the public about the Social Security scam and/or to take enforcement actions against those perpetrating the scam? If so, what, if any, additional legislative authority is needed to address these barriers?

If you have any questions about this request, please do not hesitate to contact us or have your staff contact [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to working together to put an end to this ruthless scam.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins
Chairman



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
Ranking Member