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Consumer Federation of America and Consumers Union have endorsed a new [bill](#) offered by Congresswoman Jackie Speier (CA-14), the Repeated Objectionable Bothering of Consumers on Phones (ROBOCOP) Act. The legislation aims to provide consumers with better protection from illegal robocalls and fake Caller ID. These aren't merely annoying – they are used by unscrupulous businesses and outright scammers to steal consumers' money or their personal information.

What are robocalls? In CFA's [Understanding Your Telemarketing Rights](#), we explain that these are calls made using automated dialers, prerecorded messages, or both. A telemarketer can only make robocalls to your landline or cell phone to try to sell you something if you gave the company written permission beforehand. In some cases robocalls soliciting charitable donations also require your prior consent. Robocalls for other purposes can be made without your permission – for instance, calls to notify you that your order has arrived or remind you about an appointment, alerts about emergencies, or those aggravating political calls (except that certain robocalls to your cell phone do require your consent).

Our guide also outlines your Caller ID rights: telemarketers must transmit their numbers (and the names of the companies on whose behalf they're calling (if that information is available to your telecom service provider) and it's illegal for anyone to knowingly transmit misleading or inaccurate Caller ID with fraudulent intent.

So if we have these rights, why are we still being plagued with robocalls that we never agreed to receive and Caller ID that is deliberately falsified to look like the calls are coming from government agencies, companies that we do business with, or even our friends? The problem is that legitimate telemarketers usually follow the law, but crooks don't. We need to outsmart them.

Fortunately, technology can help us do that. There are already some tools that consumers can

use, such as [Nomorobo](#) , that are fairly effective in blocking robocalls from telemarketers, while enabling robocalls that should be allowed to go through. Unfortunately, this technology does not work yet with every carrier and type of phone service. There is also technology being developed that will be able to show you if the Caller ID accurately reflects who is actually calling. This is being developed by the telcom industry and standard-setting organizations but it's been slow going. Our hope is that the ROBOCOP Act, which would direct the Federal Communications Commission to require telecom companies to offer their customers free robocall blocking and verify that Caller ID is accurate, will speed things along.

The bill, H.R. 4932, would also give consumers and state consumer protection authorities the ability to sue the carriers if they fail to fulfill these requirements. While there is no silver bullet, a combination of stronger law, better enforcement, and technology would give consumers more power to stop these rogue callers.