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Robocalls and telemarketing scams continue to represent a major nuisance for residents and businesses, but help is on the way in the form of new call authentication technology, a panel of state senators were told.

At the request of state Sen. Andy Dinniman, the Senate Democratic Policy Committee held a public hearing March 21 at the East Whiteland Township building on ways to curb robocalls. At the hearing, Dinniman, Policy Committee Chairwoman Sen. Lisa Boscola and Sen. Tim Kearney, heard from local residents, business owners, officials from the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office, and representatives of the telecommunications industry.

Jim Salvas, 78, of West Chester, now retired after a career in the market research industry, said he saw firsthand how the number of spam and robocalls has exploded due to the availability of new and inexpensive technology. "Towards the end of my career, I saw that business getting tarnished, stained by those who were impersonating researchers, or using automated calling to pollute the entire network,"

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he said. "Today, as a retiree, I see automated calls from another perspective: as a target, as a potential victim."

Salvas said he knows of one retiree who was scammed out of \$5,000 by unscrupulous robocallers and also expressed concerns regarding identity theft. Karen Cavin, who owns and operates the 5 Senses, a boutique gift shop in West Chester, said her business has been interrupted nearly 50 times a day by robocalls. "How are we to know these are not customers asking questions? We have to answer them. How do I know these are not my vendors? I've got to take them. Then we go home and there are more robocalls on the answering machine," she said. "At home, it's annoying. At work, it's distracting, disruptive and it costs you money."

Others testified that their daily personal lives and business operations were routinely interrupted, rendering landlines virtually useless except for screening robocalls through their voicemail. Joanne Grossi, AARP Pennsylvania State President, said robocalls are so prevalent because scammers know that one victim who believes their false information can result in thousands of dollars. She pointed to an FCC report that noted that consumers lose more than \$350 annually in telephone scams.

Sarah Frasch, Director of the Bureau of Consumer Protection in the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office, discussed the challenges of identifying and holding accountable robocalls, scammers and call-spoofers. "Even if the agents are able to identify a criminal, they are often located overseas, outside our enforcement jurisdiction," she said. Stuart Discount, CEO of the Professional Association for Customer Engagement, said states could push the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Trade Commission to monitor high volume, low duration calls that are coming in internationally and pressure carriers to block those calls. He also called for stronger penalties for scammers.

In addition, Discount provided some hope for potential relief from spam callers in the form of a new technological framework, SHAKEN/STIR (Secure Handling of Asserted information using toKENs / Secure Telephone Identity Revisited), to stop call-spoofing, in which telemarketers use equipment to mimic local numbers or even the recipient's own number to make distant calls display as local numbers on caller ID. "Our hope is SHAKEN/STIR, which is being tested now, can be rolled out by the end of the year in 80 to 90 percent of carriers and will substantially reduce the amount of illegal robocalls," he said. According to news reports, recently AT&T and Comcast successfully tested first SHAKEN/STIR-authenticated call between two different networks.

Steven Samara, President of the Pennsylvania Telephone Association, said the fight against robocalls was a daily battle for phone companies, but one they continue to invest more resources and technology into via fraud detection and high-volume call monitoring. "We're trying to stay one step ahead of these guys. We're being proactive, but it's tough," he said. "SHAKEN/STIR is quite simply a way to authenticate calls from the originating area. It's brand new for us. I'm hoping that as we go through implementing this we can get through some of the caller ID spoofing. It's not an end of robocalls but should cut down on them by stopping spoofing."

Both Boscola and Kearney said the hearing was informative, especially in terms of how robocalls are negatively impacting legitimate business and how they connect with existing and potential customers. Boscola she said it seemed like telemarketers and scammers utilized landlines instead of e-mail and social media because they were purposefully targeting older residents. "Rallying public and legislative support behind combatting robocalls will be the easy part. The difficulty will come with finding workable solutions that specifically curb robocalls without hampering reasonable and legitimate ways to reach consumers," she added.

Dinniman said the issue of robocalls raised a number of important questions regarding how the federal and state governments work together and with telecommunications companies to enact and enforce new and existing laws. "What's going to happen is more and more people, in terms of landlines, simply aren't going to use them anymore. It's part of a larger question of this pervasive technology and how it's being used to invade our homes. It's a question of privacy and if we're paying for these services, how are telecommunications companies going to respond?"

Dinniman has introduced legislation, Senate Bill 306, that would enable consumers to opt-out of robocalls, prohibit such calls on holidays, and require telemarketers to give consumers easy opt-out options. He has also called for cracking down on deceptive technology that enables telemarketers to mimic local phone numbers. The House unanimously passed similar legislation, House Bill 318, in February.

In January and February of this year alone, Pennsylvanians received around 353 million robocalls, according to YouMail, a robocall management company that tracks the volume of calls. That is approximately 28 robocalls per Pennsylvanian. At this rate, Pennsylvanians are on track to receive about 2.1 billion total robocalls this year — more than double the 1 billion that were received in 2017.

— *West Chester Daily Local News; also see Allentown Morning Call*

Apple is expected to announce Monday that it's launching a video service that could compete with Netflix, Amazon and cable TV itself. It's a long-awaited attempt from the iPhone maker, several years after Netflix turned "binge watching" into a worldwide phenomenon. The new video service is expected to have original TV shows and movies that reportedly cost Apple more than \$1 billion — far less than Netflix and HBO spend every year.

Also expected is a subscription service consisting of news, entertainment and sports bundled from newspapers and magazines. Apple is making the announcements at its Cupertino, California, headquarters during an event likely to be studded with Hollywood celebrities. The iPhone has long been Apple's marquee product and main money maker, but sales are starting to decline. The company is pushing digital subscriptions as it searches for new growth.

Making must-have TV shows and movies that are watchable on any device has propelled Netflix into a force in both Silicon Valley and Hollywood. But Apple remained focused on making on gadgets: iPhones, iPads, computers and its Apple TV streaming box for TVs. Apple co-founder Steve Jobs began toying with the idea of building a

powerful TV business, but he couldn't pull it off before his death in 2011. It has taken his successor, CEO Tim Cook, nearly eight years to draw up the script that the company will now try to execute. "Apple is very late to this game," eMarketer analyst Paul Verna said. "Netflix has become the gold standard in how to create and distribute content, using all the data they have about their viewers."

Netflix's prowess has attracted 139 million subscribers worldwide. But Apple will have several other deep-pocketed competitors fighting for consumers' dollars. Amazon has also become a formidable force in video streaming. Walt Disney Co. is launching its own service this year, armed with an imposing library that became more formidable with its purchase of 21st Century Fox's films and TV series. AT&T is debuting another streaming service built around HBO.

Apple has plenty of money to spend, though, with about \$245 billion in cash and marketable securities. It must prove itself attractive to Hollywood even without a track record for supporting high-quality programming and then ensuring it gets widely seen. As part of its efforts to make quick connections, Apple hired two longtime Sony television executives, Jamie Ehrlicht and Zack Van Amburg, in 2017. They have reportedly signed up stars such as Oprah Winfrey, Steven Spielberg and Jennifer Aniston. — **Associated Press**

