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Testimony in Support of HB 5296

**An Act Concerning Businesses that Make Certain Unsolicited and
Intentionally Misleading Telephone Calls to Consumers**

General Law Committee

February 3, 2015

Senator Leone, Representative Baram, Senator Witkos, Representative Carter, Senator Larson, Representative Kiner and members of the General Law Committee.

I'd be surprised if any of you haven't experienced the annoyance of receiving an unsolicited phone call from a business trying to sell you something. Most of these calls are from legitimate companies peddling products and services of quality. But some of these calls are from predatory entities which use the phone lines to perpetrate what approaches fraud. We call it "spoofing." One of the most common is a caller promising to help with your debt situation.

Sometimes you sense a less-than-professional organization by the way they introduce – or fail to introduce themselves initially. But the dead giveaway is often when you ask for the caller's name or a call-back number should you want to follow up with them. Often, the next thing you hear is the dial tone!

You can view such calls as a mere nuisance or perhaps harassment. You can only wonder what happens to those who take these callers at their word and sign on for what's being sold. But there is almost nothing you can do about it, short of registering for the "Do Not Call" list.

I believe that we do have a law on the books which addresses these kinds of "spoofers." My proposed legislation seeks to establish such activities as an unfair trade practice. This will facilitate action by the State.

But we all know the biggest challenge is one of enforcement. If you can't reach them, it's hard to identify who they are. Even the telecommunications companies struggle to figure out who is behind the calls.

So, I encourage you to consider additional language which would establish "whistleblower" status for anyone who helps authorities identify the spoofing company and how to find them. Such language could offer a whistleblower a percentage of any fines recovered from the company which resulted from such assistance. Only then might we hope that someone on the inside might give us the critical information we need to pursue legal action.

Thank you.

Representative Jonathan Steinberg, 136th District

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