



## District Attorney's Office • 18<sup>th</sup> Judicial District

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# Consumer Advisory

## Filter Out Unwanted Telephone Calls!!

If you would like to put a stop to annoying robocalls and threats from callers claiming to be from the IRS, FBI, or local law enforcement, options exist for filtering out such calls, depending on your telephone operating system and phone carrier. Consumers are fed up with unwanted telephone calls. In 2014, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) reported receiving 215,000 consumer complaints. While more methods have been developed to help consumers block these calls, a permanent solution to ending unscrupulous phone traffic is still a ways off.

Why the dramatic increase in unwanted calls? Solicitation calls are channeled through the internet via *Voice-activated Internet Protocol* (VoIP) which came into being in 2009, making it possible for telemarketers to place vast numbers of calls through the phone network at a fraction of the cost. Dishonest businesses and criminals were quick to jump on board. Despite public perception, the FTC's *Do Not Call Registry* has been highly effective at sanctioning otherwise legitimate businesses that violate this law. The true culprits behind the majority of unwanted and injurious calls are criminals associated with "off-shore" enterprises and fly-by-night establishments. That said, the FTC still relies heavily on information provided by the public so they can investigate and track down offenders and place questionable phone numbers reported by consumers on "blacklists". These lists are then used by phone carriers to filter out questionable calls. **The following are call blocking systems that are available free (for VoIP users only), or at a cost to land-line and mobile phone users:**

**a). VoIP Technology Users** - *Nomorobo* is a service that runs through internet-connected phone systems. It stops unwanted calls by filtering out numbers placed on the blacklists. *Nomorobo* was the winner of a national contest sponsored by the Federal Trade Commission in 2013 to stop unwanted calls. To find out if your phone carrier supports this technology and to sign up for services, go to [www.nomorobo.com](http://www.nomorobo.com).

**B). Wireless (mobile) phone users** - Unwanted calls that come through cellular phones can be screened out through downloadable apps developed for just this purpose. To avoid possible malware infection, make certain the app you select comes from a reliable source, such as an official app store.

**C). Land-line users** - Land-line phones presently do not have the capability to utilize filtering systems such as *Nomorobo*. However, call-blocking devices can be purchased and attached to phones to detect unwanted calls while still allowing calls from acceptable callers to come through. Such devices may be beneficial to older land-line users to protect against predatory callers. For more information, read *Consumer Reports* reviews on call-block devices at <http://www.consumerreports.org>, or google *Call Blocker Devices*.

Since the cost of such "fixes" are likely to be absorbed by the consumer, the Federal Communications Commission recently clarified that phone carriers would not be in violation of federal laws by screening out unwanted phone calls for their customers. Consumers should check to see if their phone company will provide this service for free and continue to report unwanted calls to the FTC at [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov) or 1-877-382-4357.

**18<sup>th</sup> Judicial Consumer Protection Line: 720-874-8547**