

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

**NYDIA M. VELAZQUEZ**

7TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS  
CONGRESSIONAL CAUCUS FOR  
WOMEN'S ISSUES  
CONGRESSIONAL  
PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS  
OLDER AMERICANS CAUCUS  
CONGRESSIONAL  
CHILDREN'S CAUCUS

May 29, 2018

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

Dear Chairman Simons:

As the Member of Congress representing two of New York City's Chinatowns in Brooklyn and Manhattan, I write to express deep concerns over what has become known as the "Chinese Consulate Scam." Over the past several months, local residents have received robocalls in Mandarin from scammers impersonating the Chinese Consulate General. The scammers tell their victims that they must pick up a package at the local Consulate General Office, or that they are a person of interest in a potential criminal investigation. If the victim follows the provided prompts on the voice message, they will be redirected to the scammer, who will then ask for personal and financial information.

There have been numerous media reports about the extent of this scam, which has targeted cities across the United States with significant Chinese speaking populations. According to the New York Police Department, an estimated \$3 million has already been stolen from residents of New York City alone since December, with victims losing between \$1,800 and \$1.4 million each.<sup>1,2</sup>

I applaud the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) for being proactive on this issue and informing the public by providing access to information via its consumer webpage in both English and Chinese.<sup>3</sup> The FTC, in its public notice, encourages consumers to hang up or delete the number and to report the call to the agency. The same notice later encourages consumers to contact the local Chinese Consulate General or Embassy and warns consumers about other potential scams sent via e-mail or WeChat.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the guidance furnished by your agency, the problem continues to impact members of our local Chinese community. Taking into consideration your agency's current efforts, I respectfully request answers to the following questions:

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<sup>1</sup> Nessen, S. (2018, April 26). Chinese Robocalls Are Bombarding New York. WNYC. Retrieved May 23, 2018, from <https://www.wnyc.org/story/chinese-robocalls-bombarding-new-york-are-part-international-phone-scam/>

<sup>2</sup> Wolf, C. (2018, May 28). What's behind all those Chinese-speaking robocalls. CBS News. Moneywatch. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/whats-behind-all-those-chinese-speaking-robocalls/>

<sup>3</sup> Pross, P. (2018, May 04). Scammers impersonate the Chinese Consulate. Retrieved May 23, 2018, from <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/2018/04/scammers-impersonate-chinese-consulate>

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

1. How many Chinese Consulate General/Embassy scams have been reported to the FTC? Has your agency noted any trends or patterns based on current consumer complaint reports?
  - a. How have these trends of patterns varied, if at all, since the date of your agency's publication of public notice? Have the number of reported complaints increased?
2. Your agency provides a button throughout its webpages that include the phrase: "Vea esta página en español." Yet, a similar button is not provided in Chinese. While it is understood that this button allows for translation of all FTC-based pages to Spanish, can you comment as to why such a button is not available, for the purposes of informing consumers about scams, in Chinese?
  - a. As part of your answer to this question, please comment on the accessibility of the current hyperlink on the English version of the scam description's webpage that leads consumers to the Chinese version of your notice. Is there a reason why the hyperlink's text on this page is not written out in Chinese characters?
3. Can you describe, in general, your efforts on informing Chinese-speaking consumers about this and other consumer scams?
  - a. As part of your answer to this question, please describe current FTC efforts that engage with Chinese speakers on alternative platforms that do not use the internet. In general, both Chinatowns in New York's 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District are in areas that have previously been identified as having a decrease or negligible change in the total number of households with broadband access.<sup>5</sup> In fact, the Mayor's Office of the Chief Technology Officer notes that "Spanish and Chinese [speakers] tend to have lower home broadband access than those who speak English and Russian."<sup>6</sup> Would your agency—in collaboration with relevant local and/or state agencies—be willing to provide a presentation in Chinese in a public forum for the community to attend?
4. Some materials available online from the *Pass It On* campaign would likely provide a vehicle to empower consumers against scammers. Yet, there are no materials available in Chinese.<sup>7</sup> Some hyperlinks of the Spanish version of the campaign are also unavailable.<sup>8</sup> Is there a reason why these materials are currently limited to English? When will current Spanish materials be accessible? What is your agency's plan to make such materials available to Chinese speakers?

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5 Office of the New York City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer. Bureau of Policy and Research. Policy Brief. September 2015. Internet Inequality: Broadband access in NYC. [https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/Internet\\_Inequality\\_UPDATE\\_September\\_2015.pdf](https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/Internet_Inequality_UPDATE_September_2015.pdf)

6 Mayor's Office of the Chief Technology Officer. NYC Connected. Truth in broadband: access and connectivity in New York City. Finding based on 2016 American Community Survey Data. <https://tech.cityofnewyork.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/NYC-Connected-Broadband-Report-2018.pdf>

7 Federal Trade Commission. Consumer Information. Pass it on. <https://www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/feature-0030-pass-it-on>

8 See Consumer Information page on <https://www.consumidor.ftc.gov/articulos/spdf-0183-estafas-de-atencion-de-la-salud.pdf>, for example.

I want to thank you for looking into our community's concerns and look forward to working with your agency in addressing consumer fraud concerns that are impacting my constituents and the public.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nydia Velázquez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress

cc: Barbara D. Underwood, Attorney General, New York State  
James P. O'Neill, Police Commissioner, New York Police Department