

9-25-2015

Newsroom: FCC's Sohn on Consumer Protection

Roger Williams University School of Law

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.rwu.edu/law_archives_life

 Part of the [Antitrust and Trade Regulation Commons](#), [Business Organizations Law Commons](#), [Communications Law Commons](#), [Computer Law Commons](#), and the [Privacy Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Roger Williams University School of Law, "Newsroom: FCC's Sohn on Consumer Protection" (2015). *Life of the Law School (1993-)*. 502.

https://docs.rwu.edu/law_archives_life/502

This Document is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives & Law School History at DOCS@RWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Life of the Law School (1993-) by an authorized administrator of DOCS@RWU. For more information, please contact mwu@rwu.edu.

Newsroom

FCC's Sohn on Consumer Protection

Gigi Sohn, legal counsel to the FCC Chair, delivers 4th Annual Professor Anthony J. Santoro Business Law Lecture, on FCC's vital consumer protection role.



PROVIDENCE, Sept. 25, 2015: When most people think of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC), they think of monitoring “indecentcy” on television, perhaps upholding Open Internet/Net Neutrality principles, or overseeing the spectrum that powers our wireless devices.

Yet one of the agency's most vital, least known functions involves consumer protection, according to its legal chief, Gigi Sohn, counsel to FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler.

Sohn delivered Roger Williams University School of Law's 4th Annual Professor Anthony J. Santoro Business Law Lecture Thursday night at the Omni Hotel in Providence.

“I'm proud to say that no FCC has been as committed to consumer protection as the Wheeler FCC,” she declared – and spent the next 45 minutes comprehensively undertaking to prove it.

“We are in the midst of a communications revolution,” Sohn said. “Broadband Internet, wired and wireless, is transforming our economy and changing the way we live. It's hard for many of us to imagine how we would do our jobs or get through the day without Internet connectivity. Access to the broadband Internet is arguably critical to full participation in our society and our economy.”

Yet, she added, nearly 75 percent of U.S. households can choose from only one fixed, wired broadband operator, while 20 percent have no options at all at this speed (25 megabits per second being the threshold speed).



So part of the FCC's consumer protection role, Sohn said, is to "facilitate dynamic technological change and world-class networks that drive innovation, economic growth and improvements in the lives of the American people."

However, the agency also protects consumers by reviewing large cable and telecommunications mergers, and penalizing companies that break FCC rules.

Typical violations by Internet and cable providers include "slamming" (i.e., changing subscribers' telephone service providers without subscriber's knowledge or permission – for which nine companies have paid some \$18 million in fines or settlements so far in 2015) and "cramming" (i.e., burying charges for unauthorized services in long, complicated bills – for which 11 companies have paid \$176 million in fines and settlements this year).

Other FCC enforcement areas touching upon consumer protection include privacy and data-breach rule violations, Open Internet (Net Neutrality) and transparency rule violations, as well as rules against WiFi blocking, robo-calls and breaches of public safety. The agency's role complements efforts by the Department of Justice, the Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), Sohn said.

Unimpeded access to broadband, she concluded, is "more essential to our society and economy than [it has been for] any communications network in history," impacting areas as diverse as "education, health care, commerce and governance like never before."

Sohn was formerly president and co-founder of Public Knowledge, a nonprofit promoting "freedom of expression, an open internet, and access to affordable communications tools and creative works." She has also worked for the Ford Foundation and taught law at Georgetown, Cardozo and Colorado, among others.

The Professor Anthony J. Santoro Business Law Lecture Series brings leading lawyers and business professionals to RWU Law, presenting on important issues in the field of business law while enriching the school's dynamic learning environment with practical knowledge and valuable networking opportunities. This series is a wonderful tribute to Professor Santoro's distinguished career as a legal educator, a past president of Roger Williams University and the founding dean of Roger Williams University School of Law.