



NEWS

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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FCC Takes Steps to Assist in Hurricane Katrina Disaster Relief

Announces Intention to Provide Over \$200 Million in Immediate Relief and to Create New FCC Bureau to Better Address Public Safety and Homeland Security

Washington, D.C. – Chairman Kevin J. Martin of the Federal Communications Commission today announced steps to provide immediate relief to consumers and businesses harmed by Hurricane Katrina and to enhance the FCC's planning and response efforts when disaster does strike.

The Chairman will propose to provide approximately \$211 million in Universal Service Fund support to consumers, schools, libraries, healthcare providers, and telecommunications carriers affected by Hurricane Katrina through four programs:

- Through the FCC's Low Income program, the FCC will provide support for wireless handsets and a package of 300 free minutes for evacuees and people still in the affected area without telephone service. This initiative will help people in the affected area who are eligible for Federal Emergency Management Agency disaster assistance reconnect with loved ones and make living, housing and work arrangements in the wake of the hurricane. Also through the Low Income program, the FCC will provide support to help pay the costs of reconnecting consumers to the telecommunications network as the disaster-struck area is rebuilt. The Commission estimates that these programs will provide approximately \$51 million in assistance to evacuees throughout the country.
- Through the FCC's Rural Health Care program, the FCC will allow public and non-profit health care providers, including American Red Cross shelters providing health care services to disaster victims, to apply for support for advanced services used for telemedicine applications to treat disaster victims. This program will provide increased discounts of 50% for qualified providers in the affected area and for those helping disaster victims nationwide. To speed the delivery of support, the FCC will allow health care providers to file new or revised applications for services this year. The FCC estimates that this program will provide approximately \$28 million in assistance to emergency health care providers in the region.
- Through the FCC's E-rate program, the FCC will open a new application window to

allow schools and libraries in the affected area to re-submit their requests for E-rate funds for this year. In addition, the FCC will assign the E-rate program's highest level of priority to schools and libraries affected by Hurricane Katrina to ensure that these schools are eligible for the steepest discounts available. To help these schools and libraries rebuild from the devastation caused by the hurricane and flooding in the area, the FCC will continue to assign the highest level of priority to these schools and libraries for the 2006 funding year. The FCC also will allow schools and libraries handling increased student and patron populations caused by the influx of evacuees to amend their applications for E-rate support for this year. The Commission estimates these modifications will provide approximately \$132 million in support to schools and libraries affected by the hurricane.

- Through the FCC's High Cost program, the FCC will waive or modify its rules to permit BellSouth to prioritize universal service funds to help the company rebuild wire centers and facilities damaged by the hurricane.

The FCC will also establish a "Blue Ribbon" panel composed of experts from the public safety and communications industry to perform an independent review of the impact of Hurricane Katrina. After completing its study, the panel will make recommendations to the FCC regarding ways to improve disaster preparedness, network robustness and reliability, and public safety operations.

Finally, Chairman Martin announced his intention to create a new Public Safety/Homeland Security Bureau. This new bureau would have responsibility for coordinating public safety, national security, and disaster management activities within the FCC. The FCC must work closely with Congress to complete the proposed reorganization and restructuring of existing functions scattered throughout multiple bureaus and offices within the FCC. When the restructuring is complete, the Public Safety/Homeland Security Bureau would develop policies and rules to promote effective and reliable communications for public safety, national security, and disaster management, including:

- Public Safety Communications, including 911 centers and first responders
- Priority Emergency Communications
- Alert and Warning of U.S. Citizens
- Continuity of Government Operations
- Disaster Management Coordination (*i.e.*, infrastructure reporting and analysis in times of disaster)
- Disaster Management Outreach
- Communications Infrastructure Protection
- Network Reliability and Interoperability
- Network Security

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