

**THE ROLE OF BROADBAND IN IMPROVING PUBLIC SAFETY
COMMUNICATIONS AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE**
Comments of Commissioner Meredith A. Baker
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First, I want to thank our panelists and everyone who is here today. I also want to thank the Broadband Team for putting together another excellent hearing. The applications that our panelists are discussing are very important for the American public to ensure that the public safety community has the tools to help protect lives and property. One of the highest agendas for the Commission, in my view, is to ensure that the public safety community has available to it a nationwide broadband wireless communications network.

The Commission and the public safety community face an important challenge in determining how broadband technology will help our emergency responders and medical practitioners to save lives. But the public safety community is just that, a collective organization of stakeholders with a single mission to protect our neighborhoods, and our families. We all must find ways for each member of that organization to work together and most importantly, communicate with one another. Partnerships must be formed, and strengthened so that those tasked with keeping us safe are able to do so with better resources and tools. Accordingly, our efforts to establish this nationwide interoperable broadband wireless network for public safety must be all-encompassing and must ensure that all state, local and federal interests are accommodated.

As I said during my opening remarks at the FCC cyber security workshop in September, broadband has become critical infrastructure – the enabling technology for everything, from the future of our children’s education, to the next generation of health care, to smart energy grid development, and public safety. The issues that face public safety communications are not new problems and demand the attention of the Commission. They also require a more concerted and focused effort among federal, state, local and tribal governments to collaborate and share resources and information. Our country and the safety of its people can no longer tolerate inefficient communications and poor information sharing among the government agencies responsible for keeping us safe.

We cannot look to government to solve all of our communications problems, because government has often been the problem. Several events from the Oklahoma City Bombing to Hurricane Katrina list numerous examples of brave first responders receiving wrong information or simply receiving no information due to communication failures, such as a lack of interoperability or poor network resiliency. In many cases, these issues could have been avoided had our governments spent time coordinating efforts and resources prior to the event in support of the men and women in public safety.

Today's technologies have made for greater connectivity and delivery of information. As we learned in our recent hearing in San Diego, police departments are able to transmit suspect information to officers in the field instantly, while ambulances stream vital signs, and EKG data to a waiting team of physicians and nurses. These efforts, while technologically impressive, still rely on people talking with one another. These innovations require planning and collaboration between government agencies in both law enforcement and health care communities and our support and encouragement.

Presently, governments of all jurisdictions suffer from major budget shortfalls that only further emphasize the importance of sharing resources and information. Government does not have a strong track record of being cost-effective and efficient. However, we have a unique opportunity here to discuss and develop requirements of our nationwide public safety network that will be a model of how government agencies can work together in the best interest of the American public.