

FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski
Remarks on a Nationwide Public Safety Network
As Prepared for Delivery

The White House
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Thank you, Vice President Biden, for your longtime leadership on public safety issues.

Thanks to the work of people in this room, and Congressional leaders like Senators Rockefeller and Hutchison and Representatives Upton, Walden, Eshoo, and Waxman, we are closer than ever to achieving the vital goal of funding and building a nationwide interoperable communications network for our first responders.

It's been almost 10 years since 9/11, and seven years since the 9/11 Commission urged action to ensure that police, firefighters and other first responders can communicate over an interoperable network.

The communications world has changed dramatically since 9/11. People then barely used text messaging; only a tiny percentage of cell phones had cameras; few mobile phones had broadband Internet access; and today's vibrant apps landscape was years from being born.

The unfortunate truth is that the capability of our emergency response communications hasn't kept pace with commercial innovation – hasn't kept pace with what ordinary people and businesses now do every day with communications devices.

Our first responders don't have an interoperable mobile broadband network.

Our 9-1-1 systems can't handle text messages or pictures or videos from mobile phones.

That's why in the FCC's National Broadband Plan, public safety recommendation number one was that a public safety mobile broadband network finally be funded and built.

That's why everyone here made this a vital priority.

The challenges to progress have been real, but enough is enough.

The FCC stands ready to serve as a resource to our colleagues across government and in the public safety community.

We've already taken actions within our power to advance public safety communications. With input from the public safety community, we've helped establish a framework for an interoperable network, including adopting a common air interface for such a network.

We've authorized over twenty jurisdictions for early deployment of the public safety broadband network, and the NTIA has provided funding to many of them.

We recently announced the accelerated deployment of a new national emergency alert system – PLAN – which will enable consumers to have emergency alerts sent directly to their mobile phones.

And we're ramping up our work on next generation 9-1-1.

I applaud the Senate Commerce Committee for its strong bipartisan action two weeks ago to move forward with a public safety mobile broadband network and with incentive auctions to free up new spectrum for commercial use and to raise significant amounts of money.

The timing is right. With the rollout of commercial 4G wireless, we have an opportunity to build a resilient and hardened mobile broadband network for first responders at significantly lower cost than if we wait.

But we need to act not just because we'll save money. We need to act because it will save lives.

Imagine major hurricanes or wildfires, like the one currently devastating Eastern Arizona, that require backup assistance from emergency personnel in neighboring states. If we act, first responders from different jurisdictions will be able to better coordinate their response, improving results on the ground, saving lives.

Imagine your 19-year-old son gets in a car accident. If we act, he or someone else in the car would be able to send pictures of his injuries and the scene to 9-1-1, which EMTs could review in advance. Once on scene, the EMTs could send critical information back to hospitals, including on-site scans and diagnostic information, increasing his odds of recovery.

Imagine a firefighter arriving at a burning building trying to decide the best point of entry. If we act, that firefighter will be able to download building plans over a mobile network that is resilient and reliable.

To get a new public safety network built, there are still tough issues to work through, and we may not agree on every detail.

But we all agree on the need for legislative action. We agree on the need to resolve open issues collaboratively and quickly. And we agree on the vital importance of finally funding and building a mobile broadband public safety network for our first responders.

Working together with focus and energy, we can deliver for the public what they have every right to expect: a public safety communications network that harnesses modern technology to protect safety and save lives.

I look forward to working with all stakeholders, the public safety community, our federal partners and members of Congress to get this done.