

EDOLPHUS "ED" TOWNS
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January 25, 2012

The Honorable Julius Genachowski
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: Universal Service Fund

Dear Chairman Genachowski:

I am writing to urge the Commission to make the payphone eligible for support from the Universal Service Fund (USF) to assure New Yorkers and fellow Americans the availability of reliable public pay telephone service.

On 9/11 in Manhattan, there were lines of people around the block calling loved ones to let them know that they were okay or just to find out information from an operator, E911 connecting them to Fire, Police, EMS and other first responders. Even NYC's emergency personnel were using the public payphone network to communicate with other emergency services. We all remember the time in August 2003 during the major "Blackout" along the east coast people in New York could only communicate through the Public Telephone network because their cell batters died and towers did not have power or were overloaded. In homes the cordless phones and fiber systems were all without power.

These "Blackout" and "Brownouts" occur every year in New York City (NYC) and throughout the state. FEMA was in upstate New York when over one million fellow New Yorkers were without food, power or cell phone service for over two weeks. The only things working were flash lights and payphones during Hurricane Irene. There were more outages during the earthquake in the summer of 2011.

In times of national disaster or other security situations Public Payphones play an important role for emergency communications. Today, NYC has 50 million visitors annually and many need and use the Public Pay Telephone network. This year the city was planning to remove thousands of fire alarm call boxes from all the streets. NYC, like the rest of our great State, cannot afford to lose the Public Payphone industry. Today, NYC is on elevated "Terror Alert" making Payphones an important link to our telecommunications network; a link that is more

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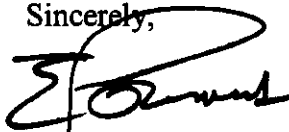
valuable if we can rely on its widespread availability. Public Pay Telephones are vital to public health and safety to NYC and Domestic Security.

As a public official, I have seen firsthand the need for a reliable system of publicly available wireline phones that we can depend on as a nation. While the majority of New Yorkers have wireless phones, as we have seen time and time again, wireless service is not flawless. Cell phones are often inoperable during these periods when we need them most, sending their customers to payphones in order to connect to the telecommunications network. Despite the proliferation of cell phones the need remains for Americans to know that no matter what situation occurs they have relatively widespread access to the communications network when outside of their homes or businesses.

Without support from the USF subsidy and at the rate at which the number of payphones is declining, in several years a person will not be able to find a payphone to use in an emergency situation. With the planned removal of the fire call boxes in NYC there will be no way for a person to call for help next time there is a blackout, a hurricane, or a fire. Immediate relief is needed to maintain payphone service and prevent the removals now before it's too late.

Thank you for your consideration of USF support for Public Pay Telephone service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Towns', with a large, sweeping initial 'E'.

Edolphus "Ed" Towns
Member of Congress

Cc:

The Honorable Mignon Clyburn, Commissioner

The Honorable Robert McDowell, Commissioner