

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN JULIUS GENACHOWSKI

Re: In the Matter of Facilitating the Deployment of Text-to-911 and Other Next Generation 911 Applications, PS Docket No. 11-153; and In the Matter of Framework for Next Generation 911 Deployment, PS Docket No. 10-255.

Today we are taking an unprecedented step to make text-to-911 available in all parts of the country. For the first time, we are proposing specific requirements and timeframes that will add text capability to the 911 system; expand the accessibility of 911 for all Americans, including millions of people with disabilities; and mark the first major milestone in the nation's migration to Next Generation 911 (NG911). The actions we are taking build on many months of Commission focus in this area, as well as efforts that have been initiated by industry and the 911 community.

Together they bring the benefits of text-to-911 to all Americans more quickly than would otherwise have been possible.

As I said in August 2011, when I announced my five-step action plan to accelerate the deployment of NG911 it's hard to understand why an airline can send a text message if your flight is delayed but you can't send a text message to 911 in an emergency. But the unfortunate fact is you can't, at least not yet. If you are a live witness to a crime and you send a text to 911 for help, it won't be received.

With text messaging so commonplace in everyday life, it is no wonder that many consumers mistakenly believe that they can send a text message to 911. We saw this during Superstorm Sandy when hundreds of people along the East Coast tried to text 911 for help. But those messages were not received by emergency personnel. Nor were the messages received at Virginia Tech when students tried to reach out for help from their besieged classrooms during the terrible shootings there.

However, when text-to-911 has been available, as during trials in Iowa and Vermont, lives have been saved; an attempted suicide was averted and domestic abuse has been prevented.

Last year, I challenged industry and the 911 community to accelerate the nationwide availability of text-to-911. Following trials in Iowa, North Carolina and Vermont in May 2012 Verizon Wireless announced that it would deploy text-to-911 nationwide in 2013 and that deployment started in York County, VA on Monday. AT&T announced in June that it would soon be launching text-to-911 nationwide.

And last week, the four major wireless carriers, with support from leading public safety organizations NENA and APCO, responded definitively to my challenge by committing to make text-to-911 available nationwide by May 15, 2014 to PSAPs that request it. To inform consumers and prevent confusion about text-to-911 availability, the carriers have also committed by June 30, 2013 to provide an automatic "bounce back" message to consumers who attempt to text 911 where the service is not yet available.

I commend the carriers and public safety organizations for this important agreement. I believe the agreement, coupled with our action today, will spur text-to-911 deployment faster than would have been achieved through our regulatory process alone. These combined actions also provide greater certainty to PSAPs about when text-to-911 will be uniformly supported by carriers and other text providers, so that PSAPs can better plan and make decisions regarding when and how to begin receiving text.

We will engage with PSAPs and with state and local governments to encourage and assist them in making this transition both quickly and cost-effectively. We will monitor carrier performance under their commitments with vigilance; we will take additional action, as necessary, if those commitments are not met; and we will act quickly to address in 2013 the specific proposals we put forward today.

Today's Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking anticipates that all wireless carriers, as well as providers of "over the top" text messaging that use IP-based or SMS protocols to deliver text messages to destinations identified by a telephone number, will be required to deploy text-to-911 and to provide "bounce back" messages where text-to-911 is not yet available. While more than 90 percent of smartphone users currently use SMS as their form of text messaging, we are taking forward-looking action given the growth of Internet-based text messaging. The Further Notice also tees up for resolution key issues including standards deployment and service deployment, location accuracy, cost recovery, carrier liability.

The Commission will also continue to work with all stakeholders--including 911 authorities, PSAPs, the FCC's Emergency Access Advisory Committee, public safety organizations, disability organizations, consumer groups, and industry--on policy development, consumer education, and public outreach to accelerate the successful rollout of text-to-911.

Until the roll-out of text-to-911 is complete, there are four simple things to remember about text-to-911:

- In an emergency, always make a voice call to 911 if possible.
- In most cases, you cannot reach 911 today by sending a text message.
- In the future, you will be able to text 911 – but you should still make a voice call if you can.
- Follow the latest developments of text-to-911 at www.fcc.gov/text-to-911.

In addition, until text-to-911 is fully rolled out, people with hearing or speech disabilities can continue to use their TTYs or relay services where they can.

Even as we move forward, I encourage other carriers and providers, including over-the-top providers, to begin work now to make text-to-911 available as soon as possible and to make sure their customers and users are well-informed about the transition. It is the right thing to do for consumers.

Finally, today's action is an important part of the FCC's comprehensive strategy to harness the power of new technologies to make the communities we live in safer. We are working on many fronts to ensure that America's communications networks are reliable and resilient – especially during natural disasters, when consumers need help the most. Key to this effort is improving 911 services, both by enhancing legacy 911 systems and by advancing the deployment of NG911 networks that use cutting edge technology to assist first responders in protecting the public. In addition to text-to-911, in the coming months we will be considering ways to improve location accuracy for 911 systems, network reliability and resilience, as well as other measures to ensure that the nation meets our public safety needs.

I would like to thank Claude Stout, Howard Rosenblum, Lise Hamlin, and Christian Vogler, representing the deaf and hard of hearing communities, for being here today. We appreciate all of your hard work and support on these issues.

I would also like to thank Sheri Farinha, who represents deaf and hard of hearing organizations in California but who could not be here today, for her dedication and efforts as well. In addition, I want to thank Barbara Jaeger, Brian Fontes, and Trey Forgety from NENA and Terry Hall from APCO for their hard work, particularly on the voluntary commitment with carriers.

Finally, I thank my colleagues, the staff of the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, and the representatives of the public safety organizations, the members of the disability community, and of the companies for their work to make today's action possible.