

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL
SUPERSTORM SANDY FIELD HEARING
NEW YORK, NEW YORK AND HOBOKEN, NEW JERSEY
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I was sworn into office at the Federal Communications Commission just nine months ago, but since that time we have had more than our fair share of natural disasters, including the subject of today's hearings—Hurricane Sandy. These events not only caused immeasurable hardship on those directly affected, they also wreaked havoc with our communications systems. I believe the Commission has a duty to find out where communications systems failed. I believe the Commission has a duty to find out why communications systems failed. Because when the unthinkable occurs, we need to know that our calls go through. And while we may not know with precision what the next storm or disaster brings, we do know we must learn from what came before. So it is my hope that today we can take away lessons and bring home facts that will help us make our nation's networks more resilient and the American people more safe.

I have made it a practice to visit first responder telecommunications facilities and public safety answering points when traveling around the country. I am consistently amazed by the dedication and resolve of the people I meet and their everyday heroism.

But without question the most powerful visits I have made so far were to the areas recovering from recent storms.

Following this Summer's Derecho Storm, I toured one of the nation's most sophisticated public safety answering points in Fairfax County, Virginia. The Director described an eerie quiet in the immediate aftermath of the storm, as calls to 911 quickly and implausibly ceased. He said he knew instantly something was wrong. He was right. And lives were put in danger as a result.

Following this Fall's Hurricane Sandy, I toured a telecommunications central office in lower New York to see the impact of the storm. Weeks after the flood waters had receded from the streets, the subterranean rooms where our networks come together were still damp. Technicians rushed this way and that, trying to make sense of an impenetrable snarl of lines and the harm done to so many submerged switches and servers. I will never forget the post-apocalyptic look of the facility. It is only one image of a storm with an infinite number of images of horror. But I also take away from the visit an image of extraordinary hope: the sheer energy and dedication of those working to repair the damage was nothing short of amazing.

In New York, I also learned from my friends in the police department that 911 operators in the five boroughs typically receive about 30,000 calls a day. Twenty-five of those calls require first responders to perform a rescue. But on the day Hurricane Sandy first struck the city, rescue calls shot up from 25 to 1900. That is not a mistake—1900 calls for rescue in a single day. It is tribute to the city's public safety officials that these calls all went answered.

Following Hurricane Sandy, I also visited several towns along the coast of New Jersey. The storm surge propelled sand dunes blocks beyond beachfront neighborhoods, with cruel

disregard for cars and houses in the way. A police chief in one town described how other towns had their communications knocked out for days. The mayor and a public safety official in another described the disaster in chilling detail but also noted that without extensive outreach early on, it could have been worse. Local officials—and broadcasters—went to great lengths to make sure residents cleared out of dangerous locations before the storm made landfall.

So from your trials and hardships we have an opportunity to learn.

We have an opportunity to understand how well our 911 centers responded to calls for help and assistance.

We have an opportunity to understand if communications systems dedicated to our first responders—police, fire, and rescue officials—performed or if they fell short.

We have an opportunity to understand what public communication is required in advance of a storm to help residents prepare and get the information they need to stay safe.

We have an opportunity to understand what it means when an increasing portion of the population no longer relies on traditional, wireline phones. Today, one in three households relies exclusively on wireless phones. Wireless phones and the towers that serve them are dependent on commercial power. What happens when the power goes out? We know that after Hurricane Sandy one in four wireless towers was out of service. How do we ensure that back-up power is where it needs to be and that providers have access to fuel for generators? And how do we help make sure that consumers are prepared, too—with back-up batteries or solar chargers?

Finally, we have an opportunity to learn from your stories so that we can wrestle some good out of Hurricane Sandy. We need to take your lessons and apply them more broadly—before the next storm hits or disaster devastates. You are essential to this process. You will help us build our record. You will help us understand what happened and how public safety, infrastructure providers, and government can come together to make our communications systems strong. Because we need an honest accounting of the resiliency of our nation's digital age infrastructure. And with your help we will make our networks more secure and all of us more safe.

Thank you to the participants who are joining us today. I look forward to hearing from you.