

**Remarks of Acting Chairwoman Clyburn
North Carolina APCO/NENA Annual Conference
September 9, 2013**

Good morning everyone. Thank you for allowing me to come back home.

It really was not that hard to say “yes” to come back to this beautiful part of the nation. So again, thank you Wesley Reid – thank you for that wonderful introduction. I am a little upset with you now – the audience has really high expectations. But I want to thank Angie Schulz, Ray Gilleland, Wesley Reid and Jonathan Bledsoe.

But you know I could not come here without recognizing that my true neighbors are here in the room. President Tommy Sullivan, thank you so much for driving over, and Renee Hardwick – it would not be a conference without seeing you.

Again, it’s great to take part in the North Carolina APCO/NENA Conference. Or is it the NENA/APCO Conference? I heard that every year you alternate whose name comes first, and that is just so traditionally Southern. I really wish we had that type of cooperation and engagement in DC – more things would get done if we were to alternate and compromise and do what you do so well here. I’ve been in Washington full-time for the past four years, and that explains why I’m wearing a suit on a golf course – I don’t know what I was thinking!

Proving that you really walk the walk when it comes to reaching out across lines, you’ve gone so far as to ask me – a native of the Palmetto State – to speak. I really appreciate that, for it is always an honor for me to join the men and women who are truly on the front lines: those of you who provide 9-1-1 and other emergency response services to the American people when they are in the greatest of need.

I’m particularly pleased to speak to emergency response officials here in the Tarheel State, for you are really leaders and innovators in many public safety fields, with communities in this state piloting text-to-9-1-1 and working on the forefront of the broadband revolution for public safety.

The work you do each and every day is amazing, and while we have been fortunate so far with a mild hurricane season, we know we can’t rest and must always be prepared for the worst.

While it is your job to serve your communities, it is our job at the FCC to serve you, and to make sure that you have the tools and information needed to protect your communities.

So consistent with your conference theme of “9-1-1 Goes Hollywood,” my remarks are inspired by the immortal words of Jerry Maguire, “Help me, help you.”

Make no mistake, we know that state and local 9-1-1 and public safety professionals are a vital part of our nationwide conversation about many of the issues we are grappling with at the FCC. We understand the budgeting, training, and prioritization challenges you face each and every day. But today I want to hear from you and learn from your experiences. But I also want to take this opportunity to educate you on a number of items the FCC is working on to help you do your jobs more effectively and to make your communities safer.

9-1-1 Reliability

Let’s start with 9-1-1 reliability.

At the FCC, we are committed to ensuring the reliability of our 9-1-1 system when stressed by large-scale emergencies, such as the hurricanes and other weather events that North Carolina routinely faces. We're committed to ensuring that system is solid.

Unfortunately, natural disasters can cause our communications networks to fail when people need them most. Consider the June 2012 derecho – that fast-moving storm that we're still talking about – that left an 800-mile path of destruction from the Midwest through the Mid-Atlantic, killing 22 people and leaving millions without power, including some PSAPs. According to our analysis at the FCC, the derecho disrupted communications networks affecting 77 PSAPs serving more than 3.6 million people in six states.

Obviously, this was a concern at the FCC, so our Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau immediately launched an in-depth inquiry into the causes of the 9-1-1 network failures and what could be done to prevent them from occurring again.

This past March, the Commission proposed rules to implement these recommendations and improve the reliability and resiliency of the wireline communications networks that serve 9-1-1 call centers during disasters.

These proposed rules seek to ensure that service providers implement vital best practices in network design, maintenance, and operation.

While we want to ensure that 9-1-1 call centers are reliable, it is also vital that the communications networks on which 9-1-1 traffic originates be reliable in disasters when help is needed the most.

Increasingly, that means wireless networks.

In California alone, an estimated 75% of calls to 9-1-1 already originate on wireless networks, and 38% of American households have wireless-only service as more and more families cut the cord.

The Commission is now considering a draft Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that proposes to improve wireless network reliability during disasters by requiring wireless service providers to publicly disclose the percentage of cell sites within their networks that are operational after disasters. This proposal could encourage competition in the wireless industry to improve network reliability by providing consumers with a yardstick for comparing wireless performance in emergencies.

NG-9-1-1

The FCC is not only concerned with 9-1-1's reliability in times of emergency; we are focused on 9-1-1 effectiveness at all times. That's why the transition to Next-Generation 9-1-1 has been at the top of our public safety agenda.

First, let me acknowledge the fact that North Carolina is on the forefront of the transition to NG-9-1-1. A sustained vision and commitment at the local level are critical to advancing NG-9-1-1 in our communities and you deserve praise for leading the way.

We are interested in learning from you as an early mover what works, what doesn't, and how federal regulators like myself can smooth the transition.

Of course the FCC has already begun moving forward on a number of measures to modernize 9-1-1, notably text-to-9-1-1.

When texting is the preferred way a growing number of Americans use their phones to communicate, it doesn't make sense that you can't send texts to 9-1-1.

And being able to text 9-1-1 has many clear benefits that I don't have to convince you of.

Texting to 9-1-1 during an emergency matters for tens of millions of Americans with hearing and speech disabilities. It matters when a voice call may place someone in danger, such as in a live shooter situation or a domestic abuse situation. It matters when voice networks are congested and text messages may provide an alternate means of getting through to 9-1-1 call centers. And I know that communities in North Carolina are on the forefront of these efforts, with Durham being the one of the first in the nation to pilot their text-to-9-1-1 engagement with a partnership with Verizon in 2011.

So what are we doing at the FCC?

Earlier this summer, the Commission adopted a requirement that wireless service providers and certain providers of over-the-top texting applications send a "bounce-back" message to consumers that attempt to send a text to 9-1-1 where that service is not available.

All of this makes perfect sense when you consider that during that mass shooting event at Virginia Tech a few years ago many students tried to text 9-1-1 but did not realize that their messages were not going through. Service providers must begin doing all of this by September 30th of this year, and I am so happy about your engagement to get us to this point.

The four largest carriers - Verizon, AT&T, Sprint and T-Mobile - are already providing bounce-back messages, and have also committed to providing text-to-9-1-1 services to their subscribers by the middle of next year for those PSAPs that support it.

The FCC is considering whether to require other carriers and text messaging providers to support text-to-9-1-1 service, and we are also focusing on educating consumers on when and where the service is available during the transition.

Wireless Location Accuracy

Next I want to talk about improving wireless location accuracy. Earlier I mentioned how 75% of 9-1-1 calls, in California at least, are made with mobile phones, so it's obvious why location accuracy is increasingly important.

Somewhat ironically, one of the emerging challenges with location accuracy and mobile phones is identifying the location of callers that make calls from home or indoors.

More and more wireless calls are coming from indoors rather than outside. As consumers cut the cord and rely on wireless for their primary service, it is so important that we pay attention to this engagement.

There is evidence to suggest that the actual performance of existing 9-1-1 location technology is not keeping up with these trends and may actually be getting worse.

The California chapter of NENA recently submitted data to the FCC showing that in a number of major California cities, the percentage of 9-1-1 calls that include Phase II location information has dropped significantly in the last couple of years to the point that less than half of wireless 9-1-1 calls in those cities

include Phase II information. This raises very serious concerns for us, and we are closely evaluating it, as well as reaching out to other jurisdictions and to carriers.

The Commission's current E-9-1-1 rules were primarily designed to deal with outdoor locations, and this clearly needs to be reevaluated in light of the consumer trends that I just mentioned. We are in the process of examining this data and welcome any additional information from you that will help us in understanding the potential trends in the delivery of 9-1-1 location information and in formulating our next steps.

FirstNet

The last thing I want to talk about today is FirstNet.

Early last year, Congress passed a law giving the FCC authority to conduct the world's first incentive auction to reallocate broadcast spectrum for broadband use.

The law also stated that revenue from this two-sided auction would support the deployment of a nationwide broadband public safety network operated by the First Responder Network Authority, or FirstNet. The Commission is taking its FirstNet responsibilities seriously and has met, I am happy to say, all its statutory obligations on time.

The Commission's biggest responsibility regarding FirstNet is conducting a successful auction that will raise money for this network. There is no higher organizational priority for us at the FCC than incentive auctions, for our goal is to conduct that first incentive auction next year.

The Commission is committed to working with NTIA and FirstNet to ensure the success of this first-of-its-kind and much needed and overdue new network.

FirstNet will be a complement to the evolution of the NG-9-1-1 system, enabling the public safety side of the equation to push data, photos and video out into the field once it is received and processed through a 9-1-1 call center.

The Commission is reviewing the comments on the technical and interference management rules proposed for FirstNet's spectrum, and we recently received comment from the public with respect to FirstNet's letter supporting prompt action to facilitate equipment certification in the 700 MHz broadband spectrum.

We are most aware of the concerns that have been expressed with respect to the Commission's suspension of equipment certification in the 700 MHz broadband spectrum, and we are committed to acting promptly on this issue.

The FCC staff is also still evaluating the record with respect to relocation of incumbent narrowband operators in the FirstNet spectrum. We are committed to working with the public safety community to minimize disruption and expense while supporting FirstNet and the Commission's obligation to facilitate the transfer of the spectrum.

We have a lot of challenges before us. I know and you know that the stakes are high. And in the case of public safety, the stakes really couldn't be any higher. We have an obligation to find solutions. And I commit to you once again today that I will be your partner, and we will work together – at the federal, state and local levels; across government, across private sector and nonprofit sectors – because I know together we can, and will, build safer communities. It is important to you. It is important to me. It is a commitment that I share with you. It is a challenge that I'm willing to embrace with you. So let us continue to work together to better serve our communities, to make it happen as partners.

And it is our charge at the agency, and your mission in your communities, to ensure that the systems that the public relies on when they are most in need, are what they expect – are what we expect – and we will continue to work to make all of this happen for the betterment of our communities.

Thank you very much for being partners in this process. And thank you once again for allowing me to come back home.

Thank you.