REMARKS OF
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Good afternoon. Thank you Derek Poarch for that kind introduction. Thank you also to APCO for having me here in Boston today. This is always a great event. But this conference was made truly special with remarks yesterday from Boston public safety officials.

For me, it is fitting to join you in Boston during the holiday season. I am a born and bred New Englander. That means I like the snow; believe water at the beach should give you a proper chill when you swim; and believe that maple syrup, lobster, and fried clams are the best stuff on earth—in that order. But more importantly, I know what it is like to root for the Red Sox—during seasons when the World Series is not in reach. In short, coming to New England is coming home.

It is also appropriate that I am joining the public safety community this time of year. Because spending time with APCO and its members feels like seeing family around the holidays . . . and I actually mean that in a good way.

I have enjoyed spending time with so many of you over the past year and a half in office. As many of you know, my very first speech after being sworn in was at the APCO Annual Conference in Minneapolis. During that first speech I committed to spend my inaugural year in office visiting 9-1-1 call centers across the country. I feel privileged to say I have been able to hear from so many of you personally.

Plus, every visit is time well spent. Because in Washington what is trite is true: leaving town is a good thing. Staying in town means getting caught up in debates that are untethered from the real world. Sitting down with public safety officials in urban areas, rural areas, and everything in between reminds me that our policies can have real effect on real lives. It reminds me that the people who answer our 9-1-1 calls are everyday heroes. Because when crises mount, they answer their phones with steely calm and help ensure that help is on the way. I know. Because I've seen it.

It also reminds me that there are gaps in our present policies that deserve our attention, our efforts, and our commitment to step up and address. After all, doing so will give those everyday heroes more and better tools to do their job. And that can make us all safer.

But rather than dive straight into policy, I want to take the next few minutes to tell some of your stories. Then I'll close with one of my own.

First, let me take you back to the summer before last. A fast-moving storm known as a Derecho blew through the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic. These were not the usual warm winds of late June. These were gusts of up to 80 miles per hour. And they were accompanied by sheets of rain and bolts of lightning.

The damage left in the wake of the Derecho was substantial. This was Mother Nature at her most angry. We had downed trees, blocked roads, power outages—and serious failures in our communications systems.

The problems at our 9-1-1 call centers were especially stunning. At too many public safety answering points, there was an eerie quiet in the aftermath of the storm, as calls into 9-1-1 quickly and implausibly ceased. Public safety experts immediately suspected there was something wrong. It turns out they were right.

During the Derecho, 77 public safety answering points spanning six states lost some connectivity. This affected more than 3.6 million people. Seventeen 9-1-1 call centers lost service completely. This left more than two million people without access to 9-1-1 during and after the storm.

It was many hours before calls returned—and in some cases days. This is unacceptable. It puts the safety of too many people at risk. The numbers I just shared with you make this clear. But the point was driven home to me in my visits to call centers that experienced the storm, especially those run by APCO members Steve Souder and Carol Adams.

I am proud to say that testifying before the House of Representatives, I said we needed an investigation by the Federal Communications Commission into 9-1-1 service following the Derecho. Because when things like this happen we have to search out the facts—wherever they lead. Then we need to apply the lessons we learn. Not just in the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic where the Derecho struck—but everywhere.

I am prouder still to say that the staff at the FCC has done extraordinary work to understand what happened. They worked with carriers, reached out to public safety officials, and combed through lots of paper. As a result, we now know that as many as nine generators failed to start, disabling hundreds of network transportation systems. We know that back-up generators and switches failed. We also know that power failures undermined network monitoring capabilities.

So we understand what did not go right. Now we need to do something about it. That is where I have good news to report. As soon as next week the FCC is poised to adopt new policies to improve the reliability of 9-1-1 and continuity of communications networks. I am grateful that our new Chairman, Tom Wheeler, has made this a priority so early in his tenure. His efforts have my full support. I am hopeful that the action we take will help make sure that these devastating kinds of 9-1-1 outages do not happen again.

Next story.

Shanika Parker had just finished working the night shift at her job outside of Indianapolis this past summer. She was on her way home to Merryville when exhaustion got the better of her. She dozed off behind the wheel. The next thing Ms. Parker knew, her car was upside down—and quickly filling with water.

Ms. Parker acted fast. She called 9-1-1 from her cell phone. But when the operator asked her where she was, Ms. Parker could answer only: "I don't know. I don't know. Can you please help me?"

Using location information from her cell phone, local police were able to trace the call. Using their knowledge of the area, the responding officers were able to figure out that her car slid into a pond next to an interstate on her way home. When the officers arrived on the scene, they found the overturned car. Mud was oozing through the windows and doors. Time was rapidly running out.

Fortunately, this story ends well. But by the time the police pulled Ms. Parker out from the car she had only eight inches of air left.

Ms. Parker issued a public statement thanking the police. But the police could not have found her without location information from her cell phone. The officers said that the area was so remote that if they had not located her when they did, Ms. Parker would not have been found for days. This is what first responders can do—what you can do—when you have the right tools.

Because the dispatchers were able to use cellphone location information, Ms. Parker survived. The fact that the call was made outdoors was absolutely critical.

You know that. But most consumers do not. Most consumers would probably expect that first responders could find them wherever they went. That includes inside buildings. After all, many of us are now used to checking maps on our smartphones and seeing that little blue dot trailing us around, capturing our precise location and sometimes even offering us services based on our location. If companies on the web can find us wherever we go, shouldn't first responders be able to as well?

That would make sense. But right now that is not the case. So what happens when the cellphone call to 9-1-1 is made indoors?

Next story.

Mary Thomas suffered a stroke in New York this past June. Ms. Thomas knew something was wrong. She mustered up the strength to call 9-1-1. But the stroke had taken its toll. Her speech was slurred. She was unable to clearly tell the dispatcher—an Emergency Medical Technician named Joann Hilman-Payne—where she was.

So the first responders turned to technology. The tower information for Ms. Thomas's phone gave an address for the call. But the address was wrong. It turns out that on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, it can be easy to get lost. Lots of buildings, lots of floors, lots of apartments stacked high in the sky. In fact, first responders in New York followed several false leads trying to track the call. All in all, they searched for eight hours before they found Ms. Thomas.

This is an incredible story. Because thanks to the superhuman efforts of the EMT who stayed on the line—for a full straight eight hours—Ms. Thomas never lost consciousness and was taken to a hospital to recover. Wow.

The next story is the last story. It's my story.

As you know, as I've traveled across the country I have visited public safety call centers. So I have seen so many of you at work in so many interesting places.

But my trip to the police department and 9-1-1 call center in Anchorage, Alaska was among the most memorable. First of all, it's Alaska. The summers are glorious, the salmon is legendary, and the occasional Bull Moose walks down the street. The police department sits at the foothills of the Chugach Mountains. The view is incredible. But I turned away from the hills and I watched the call center at work—the dim lights, the digital maps, the steady ring of phones, and the authoritative tone of those answering them. Then, standing inside, at the suggestion of one of the officers, I used my wireless phone to call 9-1-1. My call came in. My call was answered by someone less than two feet from my phone. But the system reported I was down the road, around the corner, and for good measure—across the street. Not comforting.

If you take one thing from these stories from Indiana and New York and Alaska, it is that location accuracy matters. First responders need to know where you are when you make that critical call to 9-1-1.

So here is what usually happens:

If you call 9-1-1 from a wireline phone, your phone number and your location are automatically reported.

If you call 9-1-1 from a wireless phone *outdoors*, your phone number and your location are reported—sometimes to within 50 meters, under FCC location standards.

But if you call 9-1-1 from a wireless phone *indoors*, cross your fingers—because FCC location standards do not apply.

This absence of policies governing indoor calls to 9-1-1 from wireless phones is an unacceptable gap in our public safety communications. And it's time to do something about it.

The numbers make this clear. Today, over 70 percent of calls to 9-1-1 are made from wireless phones. That is over 400,000 calls per day. But more than that, a growing number of those calls are made indoors. Wireless services are increasingly a substitute for traditional wireline services. In fact, for more than one in three households their only phone is a wireless phone. And that number is only going to grow.

So I think it is no longer acceptable for FCC policies governing location accuracy to disregard the way we reach out for help. More of us reach out for help using wireless phones than ever before. We love our wireless phones. Having them in our pockets, our purses, and on our persons makes us safer wherever we go. But when the unthinkable occurs and you call 9-1-1 on your wireless phone, no matter where you are—indoors or out—you want first responders to find you.

To be clear, the FCC has already done some work on this front. We have established working groups as part of the Communications, Security, Reliability and Interoperability Council—CSRIC—to examine and make recommendations on indoor location accuracy standards. We supported testing location technology in real-world environments. We held a workshop just last month on indoor location accuracy. And as we speak, a CSRIC working group back in Washington is delivering a report on setting up a permanent test bed for indoor location technology.

But I think the time has come to formalize our efforts and make more progress. I think it is time for a rulemaking at the FCC to tackle this indoor location accuracy issue head on. Technologies to extend the reach of our location data have been tested. FCC action can explore whether other technologies, such as Wi-Fi hotspots, can be used to complement existing technologies. And FCC action can encourage development of new technologies and new standards. But most of all, FCC action can help make sure that no one is left waiting for help indoors because first responders can't find them.

Let me end here.

I want you to know that we are making progress. We have studied what happened to 9-1-1 during the Derecho. And very soon we will turn what we have learned into policies that will strengthen the reliability of 9-1-1 and the continuity of our communications networks. That is good stuff.

But there is still more work to do. So I hope you will work with me and my colleagues at the FCC and wireless carriers and public safety officials and stakeholders of all stripes to make sure that the wireless phones we rely on can help make us even more safe and secure—even when we call 9-1-1 from indoors.

Thank you—and thank you for the important work you do every day.