



NEWS

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See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
January 30, 2014

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FCC SETS PATH FOR WIDESPREAD TEXT-TO-911 DEPLOYMENT

Building on the Commitments Made by the Nation's Four Largest Wireless Carriers, FCC Encourages Other Text Providers to Offer Text-to-911; Seeks Comment on Regulatory Proposals to Meet Goal

Washington, D.C. – The Federal Communications Commission said today that text providers should enable the public to text 911 in an emergency, encouraging providers that have not begun deploying text-to-911 to forge solutions to meet this goal. The Commission also sought further comment on regulatory proposals to help ensure that Americans will be able to send these texts by the end of the year, regardless of which text provider they use, in areas where 911 call centers can receive texts.

Noting Americans' increasing reliance on text messaging, the Commission said that access to 911 is a core value that should be maintained as technology changes. Reports indicate that 91 percent of American adults own a cell phone, and 81 percent of cell phone owners use text messaging. In addition, Internet-based ("over the top") text messaging applications are an increasingly popular alternative to the text messaging provided by wireless carriers (called short messaging service, or SMS). While voice calling to 911 remains the preferred method, consumers also expect to be able to send a text to 911 and have it reach authorities. Yet text-to-911 is not currently available in most areas or on most texting platforms.

In adopting a policy statement that outlines objectives for text-to-911, the Commission noted that the nation's four largest wireless carriers, with the support of leading public safety organizations, voluntarily committed to make text-to-911 available to their customers by May 15, 2014, in areas where the 911 call center is prepared to receive texts. The Commission recognized the leadership of these wireless carriers and the 911 call centers that are deploying text-to-911, and said that action is needed to make the service uniformly available.

Accordingly, the Commission encouraged all wireless providers as well as other "interconnected" text providers (that is, "over the top" text providers with applications that support sending and receiving text messages to and from phone numbers) to work with the public safety community to develop similar commitments to support text-to-911 in a timely manner and to propose a solution for consideration by the FCC. If stakeholders develop a satisfactory proposal, the Commission stated that it would only need to codify the solution to ensure that it applies to all providers equally, including new entrants to the marketplace, and gives clarity to the 911 community.

In addition, the Commission is considering a proposed rule that text-to-911 be made available by all text providers by the end of this year. To that end, the Commission adopted a Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that seeks comment on the proposed year-end timeframe and several aspects of implementation, particularly relating to the technical ability of "interconnected" text providers to comply with a text-to-911 mandate, as well as longer-term text-to-911 issues. To help inform and protect consumers

as text-to-911 is deployed, the Commission previously adopted rules requiring text providers to send an automatic “bounce-back” text message to consumers who try to text 911 where the service is not available.

Text-to-911 helps keep pace with how consumers communicate today and can provide a lifesaving alternative in situations where a person who is deaf, hard of hearing or has a speech disability is unable to make a voice call, where voice networks are congested, or where a 911 voice call could endanger the caller. Approximately 15 percent of the United States population, or 34.5 million people, are deaf or hard of hearing, and approximately 7.5 million people have speech disabilities. However text-to-911 is a complement to, not a substitute for, existing voice-based 911 service, so consumers should use a voice call to contact 911 during an emergency when possible.

Action by the Commission January 30, 2014, by Policy Statement and Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 14-6). Chairman Wheeler, Commissioners Clyburn, Rosenworcel, Pai and O’Rielly with Chairman Wheeler, Commissioners Clyburn, Rosenworcel, Pai and O’Rielly issuing statements.

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