

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN THOMAS E. WHEELER**

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

Promoting public safety is one of the fundamental missions of the FCC, part of the Network Compact that I often talk about. And 911 is a cornerstone of our public safety communications infrastructure.

In times of emergency, consumers expect to be able to reach 911 emergency services using whatever means of communications that are most familiar to them. Increasingly, that means text messaging. As a nation, we send and receive almost 6 billion text messages a day.

In certain circumstances, such as domestic violence or kidnapping situations, or when faced with network congestion, texting 911 may be the only practical way to get help. In almost all circumstances for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, texting is the primary means for reaching out for emergency assistance.

Today, 91% of American adults own a cell phone, and 81% of cell phone owners use their phones to send or receive text messages. And survey data suggests that over 85% of people with disabilities also use text to communicate. But, as hard as it may be to believe in 2014, most Americans still can't text 911 and receive help.

Thanks in large part to the work of the people in this building, that's changing.

A 2012 Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking asked a number of questions about potential rules, and a unanimously-adopted Order last year established a "bounce back" requirement to let consumers know when their texts to 911 are not received.

Spurred by the Commission's work, in late 2012, the nation's four largest wireless carriers stepped up and committed to implementing text-to-911 by 2014. These providers worked with the public safety community to develop a voluntary agreement under which they agreed to have text-to-911 available throughout the coverage areas by May 2014. I have repeatedly advocated the "see-saw" rule – that when companies act consistent with the public interest, regulation can be low. Today's Further Notice proposes a framework for how such a voluntary agreement would fit within our rules in the spirit of keeping regulation low for parties who act responsibly. The leadership shown by AT&T, Sprint, T-Mobile, and Verizon Wireless should be encouraged, and the framework we propose does just that.

Unfortunately, there are many in the texting space who have not followed the example set by the four nationwide carriers. In particular, interconnected over-the-top messaging apps are among the most popular messaging apps that people use today. But instead of stepping up and responding to efforts by the FCC and the public safety community, these providers have affirmatively chosen not to engage. This is disappointing, and the failure to take action implicates the other side of the regulatory see-saw: when the public interest is not being served, the Commission will not be afraid to act.

If industry and the 911 community can craft consensus-based solutions that address these issues, the FCC need only ensure regulatory clarity and uniform application to all providers.

And today, we are adopting a policy statement that establishes the Commission's policy that all text providers – both CMRS and interconnected over-the-top providers – should support text-to-911, and a Further Notice that proposes that this be accomplished by the end of 2014.

However, if all stakeholders are unable or unwilling to craft consensus-based solutions, the Commission is prepared to take further action to achieve the goal of comprehensive text-to-911 implementation by the end of the year.

One additional note.

Making text-to-911 a reality by the end of 2014 is not solely dependent on the actions of text service providers. It will require action on the part of 911 call centers, which are commonly called PSAPs, or public safety answering points.

The unfortunate truth is that, on the whole, PSAPs are not where they should be and need to be on text-to-911. It's been more than a year since the FCC secured a commitment from wireless carriers serving 90 percent of Americans to deploy text-to-911 by 2014. Yet today, only a small fraction of PSAPs are ready to support text-to-911. We've done our part. Now, the PSAPs must do theirs.