NEWS

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This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC. 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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FCC ADOPTS RULES TO PROMOTE WIDESPREAD TEXT-TO-911 AVAILABILITY

Building on the Progress of Large Wireless Carriers,
FCC Establishes Timetable for Remaining Text Messaging Providers to Support Text-to-911

Washington, D.C. –The Federal Communications Commission today adopted rules requiring text messaging providers to enable Americans to text 911 in an emergency. Building on commitments made by America's four largest wireless carriers to support text-to-911 by May 2014, the new rules will ensure that all remaining wireless carriers and certain IP-based text application providers are prepared to support text-to-911 by the end of the year. After that time, if a 911 call center requests text-to-911, text messaging providers will have six months to deploy the service in that area.

Today's action will make text-to-911 more uniformly available and keeps pace with how Americans communicate. Reports indicate that more than 7 out of 10 cell phone users send or receive text messages. Text messaging is also widely used by Americans who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have speech disabilities.

The Commission's text-to-911 requirements apply to wireless carriers and "interconnected" text messaging providers (i.e., those which enable consumers to send text messages to and from U.S. phone numbers). This includes providers of "over the top" applications that support texting to and from phone numbers but not, for example, messaging apps that only support communications among users of games or social media.

The Commission also adopted a Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that seeks comment on the continued evolution of text-to-911, including the delivery of location information and support for text-to-911 when roaming.

Although text-to-911 availability is currently limited, it is rapidly expanding. More than one hundred 911 call centers serving portions of 16 states and two entire states (Vermont and Maine) are now accepting emergency texts, and there are already reports of lives saved. To help protect consumers as text-to-911 is deployed, the Commission previously adopted rules requiring text messaging 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 can provide a lifesaving alternative in a number of different situations, such as 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 48 million Americans are deaf or hard of hearing, and approximately 7.5 million Americans have speech disabilities. However text-to-911 is a complement to, not a substitute for, existing voice-based 911 service, so consumers should make a voice call to contact 911 during an emergency when possible; consumers who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech disabled should use relay services or other existing methods to contact 911 if text-to-911 is unavailable.

Action by the Commission August 8, 2014, by Second Report and Order and Third Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 14-118). Chairman Wheeler and Commissioner Rosenworcel, Commissioner Clyburn approving in part and dissenting in part, Commissioner Pai dissenting and Commissioner O'Rielly concurring in part and dissenting in part. Chairman Wheeler, Commissioners Clyburn, Rosenworcel, Pai and O'Rielly issuing statements.

**Voteline was corrected on August 11, 2014.*

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