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United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
September 21, 2016

COMMITTEES:
BANKING
DEMOCRATIC POLICY & COMMUNICATIONS
FINANCE
JUDICIARY
RULES

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Thomas Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Secretary Johnson and Chairman Wheeler:

I write to express my deep concern surrounding a recent report that exposed serious vulnerabilities within our 911 emergency system. Given the findings of this research, I urge you to convene a working group and conduct a top-to-bottom investigation into our nation's 911 system. I hope that you will be able to make recommendations and, where possible, implement new regulations to plug the holes in the system.

As you know, a report completed by researchers from the Ben Gurion University revealed that a bot attack on mobile phones could block emergency services in an entire state, for days. By infecting mobile phones, and using those phones to surreptitiously overwhelm 911 call center lines, attackers would be able to fully disable 911 services. For the state of North Carolina, in which this research was conducted, it would take a mere 6,000 bots for attackers to disrupt the state. Given that a state as large as North Carolina could be so easily manipulated, I am extremely concerned that this threat could severely harm New York and the rest of our nation's 911 services if duplicated in mobile phones across America.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), in tandem with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), is tasked with ensuring the safety of our communication networks. Currently, 911 centers and networks lack the technical ability to block calls made by infected phones or handle the resulting level of abnormal call volumes. With nearly 80% of 911 calls coming in from mobile phones, it is critical that our nation's emergency infrastructure is equipped to defend against all malicious cyber-attacks.

At a time when our country is facing heightened risk for attack, both physical and digital, it is imperative that our 911 emergency systems remain secure and available to continue providing services around the clock. I hope you will swiftly address this issue and identify and implement solutions that will strengthen our 911 cybersecurity needs. Should you need any assistance or have legislative recommendations, please feel free to contact my staff.

Thank you and I look forward to working with you on this issue in the future.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator

