

**REMARKS OF
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WORKSHOP ON IMPROVING SITUATIONAL AWARENESS
DURING 911 OUTAGES
WASHINGTON, DC
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Good morning. Thank you all for being here today—and being a part of this workshop to discuss situational awareness during 911 outages.

911 is iconic—and with good reason. Before a blue and red light flashes, before a whistle on a fire station blows, before a pager rings, or an air horn blares—on the front line in public safety are the men and women who answer our 911 calls. They are first responders who play an essential role in helping keep us safe.

But they can't do their job when 911 outages occur. They can't do their job when our networks fail them—and then fail us when we need them most.

If you need an object lesson in why this is so important look no further than the water that is receding in Texas and the wind and rain that has hit Puerto Rico and is now battering Florida. As Hurricane Harvey and Irma have made devastatingly clear, communications is an essential part of emergency response. For the past week stories have been tumbling in from Harvey. I've had the chance to hear some of them first-hand from the leadership of the Houston Emergency Center—and they're harrowing. I know similar tales are bound to follow from Irma. We have learned of 911 centers overwhelmed, cell sites out of service, and unthinkable damage done to our networks by forces wet and gale. We also have seen inspired efforts to keep facilities in service and keep the public apprised of the dangers that lurk both during the storm and in its aftermath.

I believe what we need now is a Commission report on these storms. We need to know what worked, what didn't, and where we can improve our communications infrastructure. Once we know the facts, we need a full plan for fixing the communications vulnerabilities we are finding, including what you are discussing today—how to deal with the impact on 911. This report also will need to include a framework for rebuilding so that the communities with damaged communications facilities are not permanently relegated to the wrong side of the digital divide. Because one thing is for sure—Mother Nature's wrath is sure to visit us again. It is incumbent on us to learn from these disasters to improve emergency response and infrastructure recovery.

We can start here with your outage discussion today. But this alone is not enough. Because I think that in the wake of these storms the Commission needs to rethink its priorities. We need to revisit the objective laid out in the very first sentence of the Communications Act: to “make available, so far as possible, to all people of the

United States . . . wire and radio communications service . . . for the purpose of promoting safety of life and property.” And there is no better day to recommit to this course than today. It is, after all, the anniversary of 9/11.

So thank you for giving your time and energies to this effort. I look forward to your discussion today—and the important work you’ll produce.