

Congress of the United States  
Washington, DC 20510

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FCC Mail Room

July 28, 2017

The Honorable Ajit Pai, Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
455 12th St., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Pai,

As Members who are actively engaged on 911 issues, we write regarding steps the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) could take to make 911 services available to more Americans in times of emergency.

Today many Americans use over-the-top (OTT) technologies to make voice calls over data networks. WhatsApp has reported that its users make more than 100 million voice calls per day and Skype reports that its users make more than three billion minutes of voice calls per day. Consumers who rely on these technologies may not be aware that they do not support 911 calls.

New technologies could fill this gap. For example, we understand that a company called Onvoy has developed a technology that would allow OTT voice calls to be routed into the 911 system when cellular connections are not available. The technology requires access to certain number resources to work seamlessly for both consumers and public safety access points (PSAPs). Current FCC rules require a company to have cell towers in each local jurisdiction in order to access the necessary number resources. This rule was put in place before technologies like Onvoy's were viable, and in this case we are concerned could be needlessly standing in the way of a life-saving technology. Onvoy has applied for a waiver from the FCC, and the docket shows broad support from the public safety community, including the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) and the National Emergency Number Association (NENA).

While access to the 911 system for OTT voice callers who do not have cellular service available would undoubtedly increase public safety, it is important to note that the current technology is not a full replacement for traditional 911 calls. Although the OTT technology can provide some location information to the PSAP, it is not as accurate as the location provided by cellular or landline phones. Additionally, PSAPs will not have the ability to call back an OTT caller in the event that the call is prematurely terminated. While consumers should be aware of these limitations, they do not outweigh the potential benefit of making 911 access available in situations where it is currently unavailable.

We appreciate your consideration of our views on this important matter.

Sincerely,

  
Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator

  
Anna G. Eshoo  
Member of Congress