



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

October 24, 2017

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Pallone:

Thank you for your letter regarding the impact to communications from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. Communications services are vital to reaching help, supporting emergency response activities, and disseminating urgent information during hurricanes. The Commission takes its role promoting communications resilience extremely seriously. I agree that it is important to examine major disruptions after restoration efforts have concluded to apply that knowledge to future emergencies.

The Commission's immediate focus is on assisting with the restoration of communications services and networks in areas that have been devastated by this season's hurricanes. Commission staff have been working around the clock and over weekends on our response, and I am immensely proud of their efforts. For example, to date, the Commission has issued over 200 STAs and waivers to assist communications providers in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. And we have made available up to \$77 million in advanced universal service funding to providers in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands that can be used to rebuild networks and restore service.

We are also assisting ongoing response efforts in support of the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, in accordance with the National Response and Recovery Frameworks. In the face of the unprecedented destruction wrought by Hurricane Maria, we are continuing to collect outage information through our Disaster Information Reporting System, analyze the information collected, and issue daily reports to both Federal government partners and the general public, in keeping with the Wireless Network Resiliency Cooperative Framework. In addition, Commission personnel are currently deployed in Puerto Rico in support of FEMA response and recovery efforts. I have visited communities affected by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma to speak with public safety officials and assess the damage, and I plan a similar visit related to Hurricane Maria in the near future. I have also spoken directly with senior executives at affected communications companies to stay apprised and offer the Commission's support.

Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands were still recovering from Hurricane Irma when Hurricane Maria struck. The severity of the storms and the massive damage to infrastructure on the islands, including the near-total loss of commercial power, exacerbated widespread

communications outages. Communications providers have faced challenges restoring service. Normal emergency response efforts, including damage assessment and near-term restoration, were severely hindered by the extensive storm debris blocking roads as well as the inability to expeditiously transport much-needed personnel and equipment into an island environment.

As restoration efforts from the hurricanes progress, the Commission is also planning for the transition to long-term recovery. We have established an internal Hurricane Recovery Task Force and are coordinating our planning efforts through the National Disaster Recovery Framework. At the same time, we are mindful that we are still in the midst of Atlantic hurricane season and looking at a persistent wildfire threat in the West.

Although it is premature to determine all our after-action steps at this time, the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau has already announced plans to issue a Public Notice seeking input from a broad range of stakeholders – including state and local officials, the 911 community, Federal response partners, industry, consumer groups, and the public – on what worked during the hurricanes in terms of communications continuity and restoration as well as areas for improvement. The Bureau plans to host a workshop to better understand the issues identified through this public process and develop options to address shortfalls and opportunities. As the ongoing response and recovery efforts continue, the Commission will consider what additional steps, including field hearings, might be taken to ensure communications networks are fully prepared for future disasters.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Your views are very important as we move forward. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Ajit V. Pai
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