REMARKS OF
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APCO 2019 ANNUAL CONFERENCE & EXPO
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND
AUGUST 14, 2019

Good morning. Thank you for having me at your annual gathering to discuss public safety communications. It's a treat to be here in Baltimore. I hope that while you're in town you make some time to explore what Charm City has to offer. Two years ago, Smithsonian Magazine labeled Baltimore the East Coast's Next Cool City. And here you are. I'd say your timing is just right.

I want to begin by talking about something we need to make right. I want to discuss how Washington got wrong the classification of 911 call takers—and what we can do to fix it. Then I want to touch on a few ways the Federal Communications Commission can fix its policies to improve 911 service across the board.

So to start, head back with me to the Summer of 2017. There was—as there has been too often in this country—a shooting. During an early morning practice in Alexandria, Virginia for the annual Congressional Baseball Game, a gun was fired on the field. Confusion reigned. It was followed by a scramble as Capitol Police rushed to protect the Members of Congress, their aides, and others who were on the diamond, working on their hitting and fielding for this annual charity event. Within three minutes of receiving a 911 call, police officers from Alexandria arrived. Thanks to the swift dispatch of public safety, only the gunman died that day.

For weeks, this incident dominated the local and national news. It was still in the headlines when I returned to the FCC as a Commissioner. So on my very first day back, before I even stepped foot into my office, I headed out—and went to the 911 call center in Alexandria, Virginia. I started my return to public service with a visit to public safety.

Alexandria is a little over an hour south of Baltimore. It's just outside Washington. It's part of the broader National Capitol Region. And the 911 call center in Alexandria is in a gleaming, new building that also houses the police department. In other words, this public safety answering point is stocked with expertise and professionals who know how to coordinate in emergencies.

We saw that very clearly on the baseball field. So I kicked off my return to the FCC by sitting down with the professionals who helped coordinate the response. Renee Gordon led the charge. She is the Director of the Department of Emergency Communications for the City of Alexandria. She is the consummate pro, with years of 911 expertise. This is exactly who you want in charge when the unthinkable happens. So I asked her how the events of that day unfolded. She told me that just after 7:00 in the morning the first calls tumbled in. The operators on duty instantly knew they had an emergency that required extraordinary response.

Within three minutes of the first 911 call, help was dispatched and arrived on the scene. Over the next 30 minutes, the Alexandria team received over 200 calls about this shooting. So

they went about coordinating all aspects of response—including some you don't really think about at first but are so important, like alerting the local school to lock down, telling bus services to avoid the area, contacting air transport, and notifying area hospitals. All the while, another 400 routine calls came in that morning seeking emergency help for everything from a stalled elevator to a gas leak.

Does anyone really doubt that the people responsible for taking in these calls and coordinating response are professionals? I don't. Not for a moment.

I've visited dozens of 911 call centers across the country—from Alaska to Alabama, California to Colorado, Nevada to New Jersey, Vermont to Virginia and so many more places in between. Some of these facilities—like in Alexandria—have gleaming new equipment, complex phone systems with lots of lights, and flat computer screens that glow with calling information and mapping databases. Others are tiny, with a single table in the corner of a police station where the lighting is dim to help the 911 operator focus. But no matter the location or size of the center, some things are constant. Emergency operators inspire and amaze. When crises mount, they answer every call with steely calm and then marshal resources to ensure that help is on the way.

These operators keep us safe. They save lives. They are everyday heroes. Unfortunately, Washington does not treat them that way.

The Office of Management and Budget is responsible for a program known as the Standard Occupational Classification. This system is one of the best occupational data sets the government has and it is widely used by both federal and state authorities nationwide. But it has a serious flaw. It classifies 911 professionals as "clerical workers." This is not right—and it needs to be fixed.

Let's be clear. 911 operators are first responders. When the unthinkable occurs, they are our first contact with public safety. Before a police radio crackles, a fire engine roars, or an ambulance races, there is a 911 professional who takes in a call and sets emergency response in motion. They deserve to be classified, like their public safety peers, as "protective service professionals."

Failing to provide them with this classification in Washington diminishes the importance of their role in crisis. It diminishes how they do everything from coordinating response with police and fire officials to providing medical assistance before paramedics arrive. In short, it is their judgment and expertise that connects us to help when we are in harm's way. It is time to fix this problem and give 911 professionals the dignity of the public classification they deserve.

To this end, I spent some time with Congresswoman Norma Torres. Together, we visited the Los Angeles Police Department Metropolitan Communications Dispatch Center. It's fair to say she knows a thing or two about first responders. Because she spent more than 17 years as a 911 call taker in California and this was the dispatch center where she used to work. In fact, she bears the distinction of being the only former 911 operator serving in Congress—and she

understands how essential their work is for public safety. Following this visit, we wrote an editorial together and laid out the case to give 911 operators the classification they deserve.

Then she put those words into action. She introduced the 911 SAVES Act along with Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick, a former agent from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The 911 SAVES Act corrects the classification of 911 operators at the Office of Management and Budget. And this dynamic duo now has 103 co-sponsors of their legislation in the House of Representatives. Even better, they were able to get it included in the National Defense Authorization Act last month. In the Senate, there is a companion bill that also enjoys bipartisan support. Introduced by Senators Klobuchar and Burr, it now has 22 co-sponsors. At a time when it is easy to be cynical about Washington, this effort is good news. Stay tuned. I think we can make this change in the law and give every 911 operator the dignity they deserve.

So far, I've spoken about how we need to give 911 operators the proper occupational classification. Now I want to speak about how we can give 911 operators the information they need to be effective with every call.

I want to talk about location accuracy. Nationwide there are 240 million calls a year to 911. These days, as many as 80 percent of them come from wireless phones.

But of course, our 911 systems were not built with mobile phones in mind. Instead, they evolved from the world of wired devices—you know, the kinds of phones with a cord and a fixed address associated with every single call. With that fixed address, public safety officials could count on knowing the location of every 911 call. But over time we have changed how we reach out in crisis—and providing accurate information about where we are when we dial 911 with a wireless phone is a real challenge.

The good news is that a few years back—in 2015—the FCC took on this challenge. The agency decided it needed to update its rules so that every wireless call to 911 would come with accurate location information. As a result of this initiative, the FCC set out two pathways to develop this data for vertical information about location. One would lead to dispatchable location for every 911 wireless call. The other would lead to vertical data about location known as the z-axis.

Fast forward to 2019. We are at a crossroads. The FCC is grappling with just how to make vertical location delivered through the z-axis work. A few months ago, the agency unveiled its proposal. The FCC announced that it would like wireless carriers to provide 911 with an indoor caller's vertical location within 3 meters. It aims to have this 3 meter-standard working in the 50 largest metropolitan areas by 2023.

But here's the thing. I don't think this is ambitious enough. The hard truth is that a 3-meter policy does not provide public safety with precise floor location. And if there's an emergency, public safety absolutely needs to know what floor it's on. However, a 3-meter standard, as the FCC has acknowledged, does not yield floor-level accuracy. That's a problem. When police or firefighters show up in an emergency, the last thing they should have to do is take out a measuring tape. They need to know precisely where you are.

Right now I think the FCC needs to hear from you—because this community knows and understands just how important it is to get the right location information with every 911 call. Please speak up, offer your ideas, and inform where we go next. We need to get this right.

So now I've spoken about changing the classification of 911 operators and ensuring that accurate location information comes with every 911 call. I want to close with something different—and discuss at a high level our connected world and its consequences.

We have never been more connected in our lives. Our phones are always on, our screens are always lit, our day-to-day is more dependent on networks than ever before. We count on being online and count on being able to reach out in an emergency at any time. So we need to do a better job accounting for when our networks fail.

This is true not only for public safety purposes—it's necessary for our economic security, too. That is why I think it's time for the FCC to do a better job when it comes to network outages. We should report them, study them, and use what we learn to reduce the likelihood they happen again. I have two ideas to get this effort underway.

First, when outages occur, our assessment of them must be timely. It's hurricane season right now. We know that mother nature's wrath can visit our networks and cause widespread outages. We saw it just two years ago, with hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria—and the colossal damage they did in Houston, along the Atlantic Coast, and in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean. But it took the FCC a full year to review what happened during these disasters. A full year to report on what outages occurred. That's not good enough. We need to report on every outage in a timely way.

Second, we need to do more to improve the situational awareness of 911 when outages occur. 911 call centers can't be the last to know that an outage has taken place—they need to be among the very first. The FCC can help make this happen.

Here's how: in 2016 we adopted what has become known as the Wireless Resiliency Framework. It's a set of practices designed to prevent outages and promote cooperation when networks fail. Among the recommended practices? Setting up a national database for carriers and public safety answering points so they know who to call and where to go when an outage has occurred. But this effort has stalled. That's a shame. We should set a deadline and get this database up and running without any further delay.

I'll end here and simply thank you for the important work you do. I want Washington to help you have the authority, information, and resources you need to do your jobs. That's not only what I spoke about today, it's what I strive to work for every day at the FCC.

Thank you.