

**REMARKS OF  
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL  
17th ANNUAL HONOR 9-1-1 AWARDS  
WASHINGTON, DC  
FEBRUARY 12, 2020**

Good evening. Thank you to the NG 9-1-1 Institute for having me join you tonight and to the Next Generation 9-1-1 Caucus, including Senator Klobuchar, Senator Burr, Representative Eshoo, and Representative Shimkus for your work every day. In particular, it is an honor to share the podium with Congresswoman Eshoo, who has been a force of nature when it comes to advocating for 9-1-1.

Two years ago, I had the privilege of appearing here to mark the 50th anniversary of the first 9-1-1 call. It happened in Haleyville, Alabama. That one call in one small town started something really big. Because the idea of an emergency number took off and spread across the country.

Today, 9-1-1 has never been more popular. There are roughly 240 million calls a year to 9-1-1. About 80 percent of them now come from wireless phones—which is an extraordinary shift in our calling culture and something those folks back in Haleyville never could have imagined. And these calls are now answered by the over 100,000 emergency personnel that work at more than 6000 public safety answering points across the country.

Those people are heroes. I know. I've seen so many of them in action. I've had the privilege in this position to visit dozens of 9-1-1 call centers across the country—from Alabama to Alaska, California to Colorado, Nevada to New Jersey, and many more places in between. Some of these facilities have gleaming new equipment, complex phone systems with lots of lights, and flat computer screens that glow with mapping databases. Others are tiny, with a single table in the corner of a police station where the lighting is dim to help the 9-1-1 operator focus. But no matter the location or size of 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.

But Washington doesn't always treat them that way. In the Standard Occupational Classification, the Office of Management and Budget classifies them as clerical workers. That's not right. They are first responders—protective service professionals. And we owe them the dignity of fixing that title as we move ahead to secure the future of 9-1-1.

Since my return to the FCC, I've made it a priority to right this wrong. I spent time with Congresswoman Norma Torres at 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 9-1-1 call taker in California and this was the dispatch center where she used to work. Following my visit, we wrote an editorial together about the classification of her former co-workers. Then, 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 114 co-sponsors of their legislation in the House of Representatives. In the Senate, there is a companion bill that also enjoys bipartisan support that was introduced by Senators Klobuchar and Burr. At a time when it is easy to be cynical about Washington, this effort is good news. I'm an impatient optimist, but I think if we keep it up, we will give every 9-1-1 operator the dignity they deserve.

But let's not stop there. Because I think our nation's 9-1-1 systems deserve funding. For starters, we can't have states diverting 9-1-1 fees for other purposes. Some are still doing this and it's shameful. But shame on us if we don't also think bigger. Because we need a special, nationwide effort to upgrade to next-generation 9-1-1 everywhere. Cost estimates range from \$9 to \$12 billion to get it done. But the way I see it, there is no more essential infrastructure for our day-to-day safety. This infrastructure needs to be a priority in Washington. And right now there is bipartisan legislation in the Senate that could fund this effort from the revenues we raise at the FCC when we auction certain wireless airwaves to help power your mobile phone. But we need the blessing of Congress to make this happen. It would be a shame if the FCC simply auctioned these valuable public airwaves without first ensuring a cut for public safety. Because with the next spectrum auction, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to help fund next-generation 9-1-1 nationwide—and I think we shouldn't squander it.

To tonight's awardees: congratulations. You deserve a righteous celebration this evening. But honestly, you deserve our gratitude every day. Thank you for the important work you do.