

**REMARKS OF FCC CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI  
TO THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIREFIGHTERS  
WASHINGTON, DC  
MARCH 9, 2020**

Hello, everybody!

The first thing I want to say to you today is thank you. Thank you for putting your lives on the line every day to keep our communities safer. There's a reason little kids have long said and always will say that they want to be firefighters when they grow up. It's because you are the closest thing we have to real-world superheroes.

I also want to thank you for IAFF's voice—and in particular, for a major contribution you made to secure a big policy win at the FCC.

Obviously, our 911 system is a cornerstone of public safety in America. Every American knows the number. Every American deserves to reach someone like you—someone who can help when they call that number. But there are flaws in the system that make it harder for you to do your job.

Current technology does a good job of locating the building where a 911 call is coming from, based on x and y coordinates—the so-called horizontal axis. But if you're in a multi-story building such as an apartment complex or office building, things get a lot more complicated. If the 911 caller doesn't or can't tell the dispatcher exactly which floor they're on—the vertical axis—then first responders have to do a floor-by-floor search once they arrive at the scene.

In these situations, the lack of a vertical-location metric costs time. And time lost time can mean lives lost.

This past November, a bipartisan majority at the FCC acted to close this gap in our 911 system.

We adopted a vertical, or “z-axis,” location accuracy metric of plus or minus 3 meters for wireless 911 calls. That means that in the coming years you will be able to more accurately identify the floor-level for most 911 calls and reduce emergency response time.

This sounds like the kind of policy change that only a telecom geek could love, but in fact, IAFF was engaged. It was involved. And it played a big role in making this happen.

That's because we faced some naysayers during the process. Some people argued that the FCC should slow down—that we should wait to do something until we could mandate a z-axis metric that was even more precise than plus or minus 3 meters.

Throughout the process, IAFF was one of the loudest voices saying that we need to act now. And General President Harold Schaitberger was our star witness when the FCC voted on this proposal. It made a real difference when he sat before the Commission that day and said, “Three meters is achievable now, can be easily implemented ... will significantly speed up response, and, most importantly, will save lives.” The FCC listened, and we approved those life-saving rules.

But we won't stop there. We know that our z-axis metric should improve as technology evolves. And so we'll look at tightening the z-axis metric over time. Ultimately, we'll look at requiring wireless carriers to report the caller's specific floor level. You can be sure that we will never stop aiming to improve the system to make it easier for you to do your job.

In addition to our z-axis proceeding, I know that IAFF has also taken a keen interest in the T-band. For decades, this spectrum has been used by public safety licensees in 11 of our largest cities. But back in 2012, Congress passed legislation requiring the FCC to reallocate and auction this spectrum.

The agency has taken a hard look at the T-band. And we've concluded that moving forward with an auction of it wouldn't be feasible. The costs to relocate public safety licensees to other spectrum would probably be much higher than any potential auction revenue we'd get from companies bidding to win licenses for this spectrum.

Because of these concerns, I called on Congress last December to repeal the T-band auction mandate. Currently, there are bills pending in Congress that would do just that. I'm hopeful that they can get the job done soon.

And I'll finish where I began—by saying thank you. A few months back, I visited the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department in northern Virginia. I had a chance to meet with Fire Chief John Butler, IAFF Local 2068 President Ron Kuley, and many others who put in the work every day to keep us safe. I was so impressed by everything I saw and heard. And I'll tell you what I told them—as an American, I'm grateful to each and every one of you who suit up, rush in, and do whatever it takes to help people in the most desperate of times. Thanks again for everything that you do on behalf of the American people. Have a great conference!