



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

July 21, 2020

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
United States Senate  
425 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Ranking Member Cantwell:

On February 6, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) publicly released a report entitled “EMERGENCY ALERTING, Agencies Need to Address Pending Applications and Monitor Industry Progress on System Improvements” (Report). The Report examines: (1) trends in the use of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS); and (2) actions that FEMA and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) have taken to modernize IPAWS and increase its adoption.

The Report makes three recommendations for executive action—two addressed to FEMA and one addressed to the FCC. With respect to the FCC, the Report recommends that I, as Chairman, should develop specific, measurable goals and performance measures for our efforts to monitor the performance of new Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) capabilities, such as enhanced geo-targeting and expanded alert message length.

As you may be aware, the Commission has worked diligently to maintain and improve WEA and the Emergency Alert System (EAS), both in its capacity as the administrator of the rules governing these systems and in its collaborations with FEMA, the National Weather Service, and the various state and local emergency management authorities that use these systems to distribute alerts to the public. As the Report describes, the Commission has adopted various requirements to improve the value of WEA messaging, such as “geo-targeting” rules, which require that alerts be tailored more precisely to those geographic areas in which the alert is most relevant.

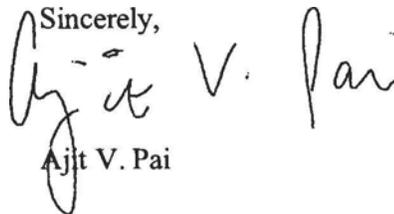
I share GAO’s view on the importance of gathering and assessing specific performance information about the effectiveness of these systems’ enhanced capabilities—many of which have only recently become available. As the Commission’s Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau (Bureau) observed in its response to the draft version of the Report, the Commission has a pending rulemaking proceeding that specifically seeks comment on whether the Commission should adopt performance metrics, such as benchmarks regarding the extent to which these alerts have been received. As the Bureau further observed, because there is substantial debate in the record on how to establish effective metrics and measures, we have focused our efforts on getting WEA and its recently enhanced geo-targeting and other

functionalities up and running, and gathering raw data on system performance, before we take any further action in the pending rulemaking.

To that end, the Bureau has been working with local jurisdictions to tailor parameters of WEA tests within their jurisdictions that would develop and address feedback provided by alert originators, and gather data to inform the Commission's understanding of WEA's effectiveness.<sup>6</sup> For example, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States, the Bureau had been working with local emergency management officials to conduct end-to-end WEA tests. (Those tests have been deferred during the response to COVID-19 in the jurisdictions involved.) The goals for testing geo-targeting in these end-to-end WEA tests include: (i) ensuring that the testing methodology achieves statistically significant results, and (ii) if achieved, determining the current baseline performance of participating Commercial Mobile Service Providers' enhanced geo-targeting capabilities by tabulating WEA delivery rates inside and outside of a prescribed geo-targeted area.

Once we better understand baseline performance, we can more clearly assess whether the WEA improvements are working as intended and will be able to make better-informed decisions on how to improve geo-targeting implementations, consider specific numerical targets for improvement in subsequent rounds of enhanced geo-targeting testing, and potentially inform possible future efforts, including additional system tests authorized by or conducted by the Commission, as well as resolution of the Commission's pending rulemaking.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the GAO Report and would be happy to discuss further if you have any questions.

Sincerely,  
  
Ajit V. Pai

The Honorable Nydia Velázquez  
The Honorable Peter DeFazio  
The Honorable Sam Graves  
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The Honorable Michael McCaul  
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
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July 21, 2020

The Honorable James Comer  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2471 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member Comer:

On February 6, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) publicly released a report entitled “EMERGENCY ALERTING, Agencies Need to Address Pending Applications and Monitor Industry Progress on System Improvements” (Report). The Report examines: (1) trends in the use of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS); and (2) actions that FEMA and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) have taken to modernize IPAWS and increase its adoption.

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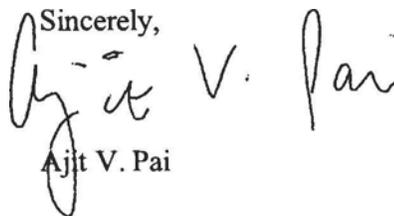
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
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July 21, 2020

The Honorable Chris Coons  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government  
United States Senate  
125 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Ranking Member Coons:

On February 6, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) publicly released a report entitled “EMERGENCY ALERTING, Agencies Need to Address Pending Applications and Monitor Industry Progress on System Improvements” (Report). The Report examines: (1) trends in the use of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS); and (2) actions that FEMA and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) have taken to modernize IPAWS and increase its adoption.

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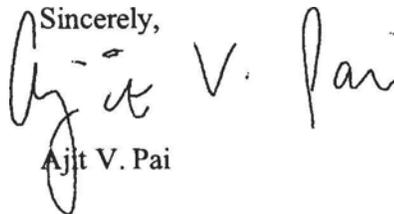
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July 21, 2020

The Honorable Tom Graves  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1016 Longworth Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member Graves:

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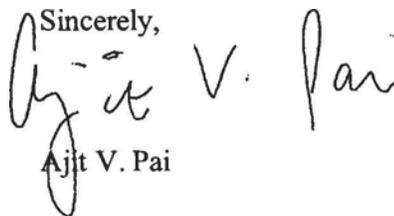
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
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July 21, 2020

The Honorable Ron Johnson  
Chairman  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Johnson:

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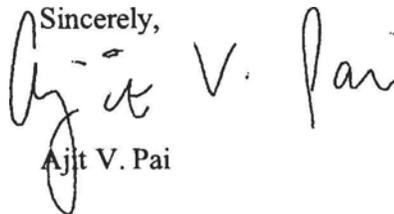
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
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OFFICE OF  
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July 21, 2020

The Honorable John N. Kennedy  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government  
United States Senate  
S-128 The Capital Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Kennedy:

On February 6, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) publicly released a report entitled “EMERGENCY ALERTING, Agencies Need to Address Pending Applications and Monitor Industry Progress on System Improvements” (Report). The Report examines: (1) trends in the use of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS); and (2) actions that FEMA and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) have taken to modernize IPAWS and increase its adoption.

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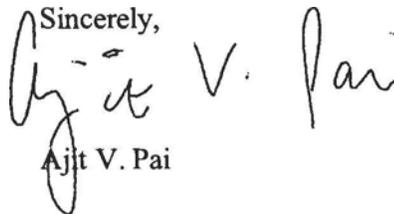
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
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July 21, 2020

The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2157 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Maloney:

On February 6, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) publicly released a report entitled “EMERGENCY ALERTING, Agencies Need to Address Pending Applications and Monitor Industry Progress on System Improvements” (Report). The Report examines: (1) trends in the use of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS); and (2) actions that FEMA and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) have taken to modernize IPAWS and increase its adoption.

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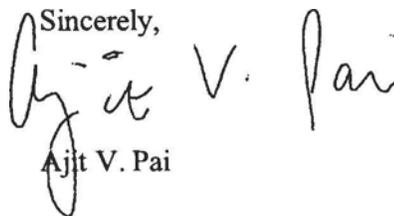
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July 21, 2020

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Pallone:

On February 6, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) publicly released a report entitled “EMERGENCY ALERTING, Agencies Need to Address Pending Applications and Monitor Industry Progress on System Improvements” (Report). The Report examines: (1) trends in the use of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS); and (2) actions that FEMA and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) have taken to modernize IPAWS and increase its adoption.

The Report makes three recommendations for executive action—two addressed to FEMA and one addressed to the FCC. With respect to the FCC, the Report recommends that I, as Chairman, should develop specific, measurable goals and performance measures for our efforts to monitor the performance of new Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) capabilities, such as enhanced geo-targeting and expanded alert message length.

As you may be aware, the Commission has worked diligently to maintain and improve WEA and the Emergency Alert System (EAS), both in its capacity as the administrator of the rules governing these systems and in its collaborations with FEMA, the National Weather Service, and the various state and local emergency management authorities that use these systems to distribute alerts to the public. As the Report describes, the Commission has adopted various requirements to improve the value of WEA messaging, such as “geo-targeting” rules, which require that alerts be tailored more precisely to those geographic areas in which the alert is most relevant.

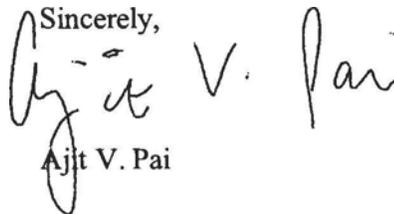
I share GAO’s view on the importance of gathering and assessing specific performance information about the effectiveness of these systems’ enhanced capabilities—many of which have only recently become available. As the Commission’s Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau (Bureau) observed in its response to the draft version of the Report, the Commission has a pending rulemaking proceeding that specifically seeks comment on whether the Commission should adopt performance metrics, such as benchmarks regarding the extent to which these alerts have been received. As the Bureau further observed, because there is substantial debate in the record on how to establish effective metrics and measures, we have focused our efforts on getting WEA and its recently enhanced geo-targeting and other

functionalities up and running, and gathering raw data on system performance, before we take any further action in the pending rulemaking.

To that end, the Bureau has been working with local jurisdictions to tailor parameters of WEA tests within their jurisdictions that would develop and address feedback provided by alert originators, and gather data to inform the Commission's understanding of WEA's effectiveness.<sup>7</sup> For example, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States, the Bureau had been working with local emergency management officials to conduct end-to-end WEA tests. (Those tests have been deferred during the response to COVID-19 in the jurisdictions involved.) The goals for testing geo-targeting in these end-to-end WEA tests include: (i) ensuring that the testing methodology achieves statistically significant results, and (ii) if achieved, determining the current baseline performance of participating Commercial Mobile Service Providers' enhanced geo-targeting capabilities by tabulating WEA delivery rates inside and outside of a prescribed geo-targeted area.

Once we better understand baseline performance, we can more clearly assess whether the WEA improvements are working as intended and will be able to make better-informed decisions on how to improve geo-targeting implementations, consider specific numerical targets for improvement in subsequent rounds of enhanced geo-targeting testing, and potentially inform possible future efforts, including additional system tests authorized by or conducted by the Commission, as well as resolution of the Commission's pending rulemaking.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the GAO Report and would be happy to discuss further if you have any questions.

Sincerely,  
  
Ajit V. Pai

The Honorable Nydia Velázquez  
The Honorable Peter DeFazio  
The Honorable Sam Graves  
The Honorable Al Green  
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The Honorable Michael McCaul  
The Honorable Gary Palmer  
The Honorable Ann Wagner  
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

July 21, 2020

The Honorable Gary Peters  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate  
442 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Ranking Member Peters:

On February 6, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) publicly released a report entitled “EMERGENCY ALERTING, Agencies Need to Address Pending Applications and Monitor Industry Progress on System Improvements” (Report). The Report examines: (1) trends in the use of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS); and (2) actions that FEMA and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) have taken to modernize IPAWS and increase its adoption.

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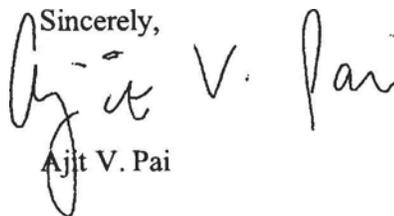
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
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OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

July 21, 2020

The Honorable Mike Quigley  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2000 Rayburn House Office Building (G Floor)  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Quigley:

On February 6, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) publicly released a report entitled “EMERGENCY ALERTING, Agencies Need to Address Pending Applications and Monitor Industry Progress on System Improvements” (Report). The Report examines: (1) trends in the use of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS); and (2) actions that FEMA and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) have taken to modernize IPAWS and increase its adoption.

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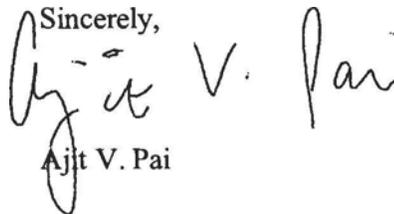
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

July 21, 2020

The Honorable Greg Walden  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2322A Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Ranking Member Walden:

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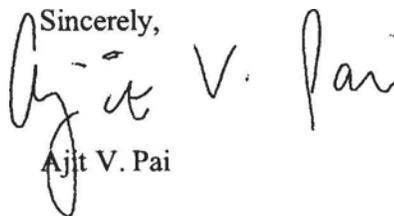
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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

July 21, 2020

The Honorable Roger Wicker  
Chairman  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
United States Senate  
512 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Wicker:

On February 6, 2020, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) publicly released a report entitled “EMERGENCY ALERTING, Agencies Need to Address Pending Applications and Monitor Industry Progress on System Improvements” (Report). The Report examines: (1) trends in the use of the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS); and (2) actions that FEMA and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC or Commission) have taken to modernize IPAWS and increase its adoption.

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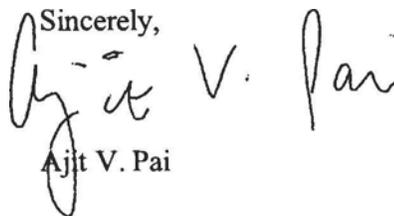
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