

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *911 Fee Diversion*, PS Docket No. 20-291, *New and Emerging Technologies 911 Improvement Act of 2008*, PS Docket No. 09-14, Notice of Inquiry (September 30, 2020)

As the saying goes, you may only call 911 once in your life, but it will be the most important call you ever make. Chances are that when you make that call, you won't put much thought into the system that's behind it. So let's take a moment to praise the people behind our 911 system and recognize the folks who keep us connected when the unthinkable occurs. We can start with Betty Wafer.

I first saw her in action at the 911 call center in Dallas, Texas. She was born and raised in the Big D and knows the city inside and out. It makes a difference. Because when people cry out for help, she knows the ins and outs of how to deploy in the city she loves and has always called home. Over the course of three decades she rose to the top of its public safety ranks. Today she is in charge of all 911 communications for the Dallas Police Department.

There is not a lot Betty Wafer hasn't seen. Like most people who work on the 911 front lines, she has a preternatural calm. After all, these are people who listen to us at our most troubled and then help ensure that help is on the way. As we walked through her call center, she spoke with authority about how technology has changed, how essential it was to be able to keep up, and how important it was to ensure that funding for 911 makes it to its intended destination.

I was so inspired by that trip that we partnered to write an editorial that was published over four years ago. We wrote about the need for a national funding plan for 911 and tops on our list was ending 911 fee diversion. It's not acceptable when states allow a line item on communications bills that expressly says it is for 911 service but then turn around and send those fees elsewhere.

It was the first time anyone from this agency had written on this subject. I then testified before Congress about it. Later I shared the pen with Commissioner O'Rielly who shares my concern about this practice. He deserves credit for pressing this issue in a big way. I'm glad to see that some of the ideas we put forward—including efforts to incentivize fee-diverting states to do the right things—are included in today's notice of inquiry. It also asks appropriate questions about the boundaries of this agency's authority and seeks ideas regarding the steps we can take to improve our annual fee diversion reports and put the pressure on to end this ugly practice altogether.

All good ideas are welcome. They can make a meaningful difference across the country as we navigate the transition to next-generation 911. They are especially important for states wrestling with funding challenges in the here and now that have been brought on by this pandemic. And they matter for our nation's 911 operators, like Betty Wafer and the thousands of others who run our 911 centers across the country. They deserve the support intended for them; fee diversion needs to stop.

I fully support this inquiry and look forward to the record that will develop.