

**OPENING STATEMENT OF
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL
FIELD HEARING ON HURRICANE IDA AND NETWORK RESILIENCE
OCTOBER 26, 2021**

Re: *Resilient Networks*, PS Docket No. 21-346; *Amendments to Part 4 of the Commission's Rules Concerning Disruptions to Communications*, PS Docket No. 15-80; *New Part 4 of the Commission's Rules Concerning Disruptions to Communications*, ET Docket No. 04-35

Welcome to our Field Hearing on improving the resiliency and recovery of communications networks during disasters.

From the start, let me acknowledge that we're doing this virtually. It's not your typical Federal Communications Commission field hearing. But what I believe we should make typical is that after a disaster where communications networks fail, we do more than bemoan what happened. We do more than express our sympathy. Instead, we engage in a serious effort to identify what went wrong, what went right, and how we can do better in the future.

Last month, I traveled to Louisiana with Commissioner Carr. We criss-crossed a long, flat stretch of the state that was affected by Hurricane Ida. Here's what struck me. Wind and water can be so cruel. Weeks after the storm hit, there were still mangled store signs along the road and piles of refuse waiting to be cleared away. But there was also determination. I saw it in everyone we met and everyone I had the privilege to speak to—state public safety leaders in Baton Rouge, 911 call center operators in Livingston, broadband companies in LaPlace, and FirstNet officials in Raceland. Everyone we spoke with wanted to tell us their stories and give us their ideas. They wanted us to know with precision where communications failed in the storm and how better preparation and more resilient networks could help save lives. Some of the people we spoke to are joining us today to share their experiences with all of you too. That includes Captain Jack Varnado from the Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office and Janet Britton from REV Broadband.

We carried their words back to Washington and started a rulemaking last month to explore steps to improve the reliability and resiliency of communications networks during emergencies. I want to thank all my colleagues for supporting this effort. Likewise, I want to thank them for participating in this hearing today. I've long said we need to make it a standard practice for the FCC to learn as much as possible from every communications outage and when feasible this should include timely field hearings. So, with the recovery from Hurricane Ida well underway, now is an appropriate time to take this opportunity to gather new information and lessons learned.

Because we know that another storm will come. It's not just hurricanes along the Gulf Coast. We have seen snowstorms in Texas and fires blazing out west. We know there will be more events that test our communications infrastructure. And I believe it's time to better prepare our networks for the future. To do that, we must investigate aggressively, follow the facts wherever they may lead, and find out what went right and what went wrong. There are four areas that I think deserve our attention now.

First, when disaster strikes, we need to be able to use all available infrastructure to connect as many people as possible. In Louisiana, I heard how the voluntary Wireless Resiliency Cooperative Framework helped speed up service restoration for many people in the affected areas. Under this Framework, wireless carriers opened up their networks to provide mutual aid to their competitors' customers through reciprocal roaming agreements. But Travis Johnson, the Program Manager at the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, pointed out that setting up these kinds of arrangements only after a storm hits is already too late. On top of that, there was confusion about

the status of roaming, where it was available and which network technologies were used. So there is room for improvement.

Second, we need to promote better situational awareness during disasters by ensuring that life-saving information is being communicated to all stakeholders who need it—especially public safety. Captain Jack Varnado is here with us today. He runs a 911 call center in Livingston Parish, Louisiana. When we spoke last month, he explained to me that in many cases 911 call centers are the last to find out about major outages that might affect the public's ability to reach emergency services. That doesn't seem right. When 911 call centers have this information, they are very good at pre-planning to have these calls re-routed to other call centers or to administrative lines. So I think we need to explore ways to get public safety the actionable information they need to save lives.

Third, we need to better prepare for power outages and the consequences for communications. We know that the lack of commercial power at communications facilities is a big reason for communications failures following a disaster. With this in mind, we need to explore communications resilience strategies for power outages, including better coordination between communications providers and power companies, as well as improved backup power.

Fourth, we need to promote equity in disaster recovery. Those hit hardest by storms and their aftermath are often our most vulnerable. Equity considerations should be accounted for in planning and recovery, including the pre-positioning of assets in anticipation of disaster.

I look forward to exploring these issues today with the distinguished group we have brought together for our two panels.

Panel One will examine first-hand accounts from public safety and communications industry stakeholders responding to disasters. Panel Two will explore steps to improve resiliency in our networks so communications remain available and accessible for all.

We have a lot of ground to cover. So we're going to get this program rolling. It is now my pleasure to turn the floor over to my colleagues to offer their thoughts.