

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI

Re: *Wireless Emergency Alerts, PS Docket No. 15-91; Amendments to Part 11 of the Commission's Rules Regarding the Emergency Alert System, PS Docket No. 15-94.*

When disaster strikes, it's essential that Americans in harm's way get reliable information so that they can stay safe and protect their loved ones. The wireless emergency alert system, or WEA, is one important tool for emergency managers to quickly convey such information, such as tornado warnings, to the public on their mobile devices.

Since WEA became operational in 2012, it's been used over 33,000 times. Recently, WEA was used four times in response to wildfires in Northern California, and 16 times during the wildfires around Los Angeles. WEA was also used extensively in all areas affected by recent hurricanes, including 21 alerts sent in Puerto Rico alone.

But we've heard that many jurisdictions are hesitant to use WEA because it lacks granularity¹—that is, people may receive the alert even though they're located well outside of an intended target area. Overbroad alerting can cause public confusion, lead some to opt out of receiving alerts altogether, and, in many instances, complicate rescue efforts by unnecessarily causing traffic congestion and overloading call centers.

As I've said before, people shouldn't miss out on potentially life-saving information just because "the alert system's current brushstroke is too broad."² This morning, we address this problem by bringing a finer brush to bear on the canvas.

Today's *Report and Order* requires participating wireless providers to deliver alerts to match 100% of the target area that overlaps with the wireless provider's network coverage area, with an overshoot of no more than one-tenth of a mile. This rule will help channel alerts to Americans who actually need them. And equally important, this rule will give alert originators the assurance they need to rely on WEA as a valuable tool to help save lives. Indeed, Harris County Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator Francisco Sanchez has said that this rule "will be the single most important improvement to the nation's alerts and warnings infrastructure in years."³

I understand that there is some division over the rule's November 2019 implementation deadline. Some say this schedule is too aggressive. Some say it's not aggressive enough. I think it's just right. On this public safety matter, I favor an approach that I believe is aggressive and achievable. The record indicates that November 2019 meets this test.

In short, this rule, coupled with the other improvements we adopt today—enabling consumers to retrieve alerts for 24 hours after they are received, clarifying the difference between providers

¹ Aaron C. Davis and Sandhya Somashekhar, The only California county that sent a warning to residents' cellphones has no reported fatalities, *The Washington Post* (Oct. 13, 2017), available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/the-only-california-county-that-sent-a-warning-to-residents-cellphones-has-no-reported-fatalities/2017/10/13/b28b5af4-b01f-11e7-a908-a3470754bbb9_story.html.

² *Wireless Emergency Alerts; Amendments to Part 11 of the Commission's Rules Regarding the Emergency Alert System, PS Docket Nos. 15-91, 15-94, Report and Order and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*, 31 FCC Rcd 11112, 11268 (2016) (Statement of Commissioner Ajit Pai), available at <https://www.fcc.gov/document/improving-wireless-emergency-alerts-and-community-initiated-alerting-1/pai-statement>.

³ Letter from Francisco Sanchez, Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator, Harris County, to FCC Chairman Ajit Pai et al., PS Docket No. 15-94 (Jan. 19, 2018), <https://www.fcc.gov/ecfs/filing/101201689514842>; see also News Release, FCC, What They're Saying About Chairman Pai's WEA Proposal (Jan. 25, 2018), <https://www.fcc.gov/document/what-theyre-saying-about-chairman-pais-wea-proposal>.

participating in WEA “in part” versus “in whole,” and harmonizing the deadline for implementing Spanish language alerting with the deadline for implementing longer, 360-character length messages—will strengthen the WEA system and keep Americans safer.

Finally, I want to thank the staff of the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau for all their hard work and commitment to serving the public: Rochelle Cohen, Greg Cooke, Lisa Fowlkes, Megan Henry, Nicole McGinnis, Rasoul Safavian, Emily Talaga, and James Wiley. And from the Office of General Counsel, thanks to David Horowitz, Bill Richardson, and Anjali Singh.