

**STATEMENT OF
ACTING CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Amendments to Part 4 of the Commission's Rules Concerning Disruptions to Communications*, PS Docket No. 15-80, Second Report and Order (March 17, 2021)

They say everything is bigger in Texas, and so it goes for winter storms, too. Last month, Winter Storm Uri hammered the United States, leading to severe weather in 25 states affecting more than 150 million Americans. So many parts of the country—from Maine to Oregon—were blanketed in snow, ice, and frigid temperatures. But Texas was hit the hardest.

For Texans, it was a crisis within a crisis within a crisis. The state's independent power grid failed, leaving millions without power. Water treatment plants failed too, leading to boil warnings across the state.

The loss of any of these fundamental utilities is a crisis unto itself. But in Texas one storm brushed up against another: a pandemic that has driven life online. After months of being stuck at home, many Americans know full well that—like power and water—internet access is essential. These days we need it to work, go to school, see a doctor, or stay connected to civic and economic life. But in Texas and Oklahoma, Winter Storm Uri also caused widespread communications outages. At one point, nearly 400,000 wireless users were without service. At the same time, more than 720,000 VoIP users were affected. These failures are especially serious because they can hamper emergency response and disaster relief efforts.

Today, the snow has melted, the freezing temperatures have warmed, and power has returned. But we will be dealing with the aftermath of this storm for months to come. It is a reminder that so much of our critical infrastructure is fragile. On too many occasions when disaster has struck, this also has been true for communications. We have seen it in season after season of hurricanes in the south and wildfires in the west. The names stay with us—Maria, Irma, Harvey, Michael, Camp, Woolsey, Kincade—long after the water has receded, the flames have extinguished, and the communities affected have begun the hard slog of repairing and replacing essential infrastructure.

Mother Nature's wrath is sure to visit us again. So are 911 failures and power outages and other threats to network infrastructure. That's why I believe the Federal Communications Commission needs to fundamentally refresh its playbook for disaster preparedness and resiliency. And we start that effort today, by updating our network outage reporting rules.

Right now, the Commission collects outage information through its Network Outage Reporting System—or NORS—and its voluntary Disaster Information Reporting System—or DIRS. But for too long we have held this information for ourselves, sharing it only with the Department of Homeland Security. That means we have shut out other government partners in disaster. But we know that when the unthinkable occurs getting out accurate information about communications and outages can save lives and property. It can help speed restoration of service. So in this decision we right this wrong by creating a framework to provide federal, state, local and Tribal partners with access to the NORS and DIRS information they need during emergencies, natural disasters—and now pandemics.

This decision is good news for public safety. It will promote better information sharing and awareness during emergencies. This effort is also overdue. It was more than ten years ago that the California Public Utilities Commission petitioned this agency to help provide state authorities with timely access to outage information like what we have in DIRS. It was five years ago that this agency issued a rulemaking that proposed to grant state officials access to NORS data regarding outages in their states. I am happy that we are finally taking this important action in my second meeting as Acting Chairwoman so that we can continue to improve the way we work with state public safety officials to help restore

communications after a disaster.

Thank you to the agency staff who worked on this effort. From the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau that's Rochelle Cohen, Lisa Fowlkes, Nicole McGinnis, Saswat Misra, Austin Randazzo, and Julia Tu. From the Office of General Counsel that's David Horowitz, Joel Rabinovitz, Bill Richardson, and Anjali Singh. From the Office of Economics and Analytics that's Chuck Needy. From the Enforcement Bureau that's Shannon Lipp and Jeremy Marcus and from the Office of Communications Business Opportunities a thank you to Chana Wilkerson.