

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL**

Re: *Location-Based Routing for Wireless 911 Calls*, PS Docket No. 18-64, Public Notice
(June 8, 2022)

As the old saying goes, you may only call 911 once in your life, but it will be the most important call you ever make. That is one call you want to go through.

I know. Because I have watched our nation's 911 operators in action in dozens of call centers all across the country. In each and every one I saw operators take calls with steely calm and then assure the caller that help is on the way. But what I saw in the 911 center in Little Rock stays with me. The center was small but active. The desks were humming as the calls came in. The pride the public safety officials had for their work was palpable.

But what struck me most when I visited is that I learned that in the city of Little Rock if you call 911 using your wireless phone in the corner of the 911 center your call would not get routed to Little Rock. Instead, it would be answered by a 911 center in North Little Rock—which is all the way on the other side of the Arkansas River. That's because your call would be routed based on the location of the closest cell tower that receives your call—not based on your actual location.

That's a problem. Because when you make a 911 call, seconds matter. 911 calls that are routed to the wrong call center need to be rerouted to the right one. That takes time you may not have.

Here's the good news. Back in 2018 the Commission started an inquiry to explore the possibilities of Location-Based Routing to fix this problem and speed up 911 responses. Since then, some of our largest nationwide carriers have started using this technology in parts of their networks. That's good. But for most of the country today, the closest cell tower with the strongest signal will still route the 911 call, and that doesn't guarantee it will go to right call center that can send help.

So today we are jump starting our efforts to support location-based 911 routing. With this Public Notice we seek to build an updated record on carrier experiences, the state of this technology, and the steps the agency could take to improve 911 call routing.

But when it comes to 911, I don't think we should stop with improved call routing. That's because across the board we need to bring our 911 emergency communications systems into the future. There are more than 6,000 911 centers across the country and many of them are using legacy technology built for an era when calls in crisis came strictly from landline phones. It is time to make the switch to next-generation 911 systems.

Next-generation 911 means better support for voice, text, data, and video communications. It means more redundancy to protect against outages. For those who call 911, it will mean the opportunity to offer real-time video of the emergency. It will mean the ability to provide first responders with instantaneous pictures. It will mean the ability to transmit a

patient's medical records right to 911 dispatchers. For those who take calls in an emergency, all of this data can expedite and inform public safety efforts, and dramatically improve emergency response.

Here's the challenge. These kinds of 911 investments don't come cheap. And for the thousands of communities across the country that have to do these upgrades, it's not clear where the support to make them will come from. That's why I've suggested we should put our public airwaves to broader public purpose in support of next-generation 911.

The FCC's authority to auction spectrum is scheduled to expire at the end of this fiscal year. That's September 30, 2022. At some point, we can expect legislation to extend it—so the agency can continue to offer airwaves for new commercial uses. We should work with Congress and public safety officials to use the billions of dollars that FCC spectrum auctions raise to build the public infrastructure this country needs, starting with using future auction revenues to fund the nation's transition to next-generation 911.

I think this is a golden opportunity. It would benefit public safety nationwide—and every one of us who dials 911 when the unthinkable occurs. In short, we can have an updated public emergency calling system that is built for the digital age, and we can use public airwaves to do it.

That's big and bold. But it doesn't take away from the effort at hand. Because improving call routing will improve safety. In fact, I know it will in Little Rock and so many other communities nationwide.

I would like to thank the staff that worked on this effort, including Brenda Boykin, John Evanoff, David Furth, Rasoul Safavian, and Rachel Wehr from the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau; Douglas Klein and Anjali Singh from the Office of General Counsel; and Pat Brogan, Michelle Schaefer, Deena Shetler, and Aleks Yankelevich from the Office of Economics and Analytics.