**Remarks of Lisa M. Fowlkes**

**Chief, Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau**

**NENA Conference**

**Monday, June 17, 2019**

**Orlando, Florida**

**-As Prepared for Delivery-**

Thank you so much for that kind introduction, Brian [Fontes]. And thanks to all of you in the audience – particularly the dedicated public safety professionals who are on the front lines every day responding to 911 calls and dispatching help to those who need it most.

Last year, I spoke to many of you at “911 Goes to Washington,” but this is the first time I have had the privilege of attending a NENA conference. So for those of you that don’t know me, let me quickly introduce myself.

I am not new to the Commission. I have been at the FCC for over 25 years, serving in several different Bureaus, including the Wireless Bureau and the Enforcement Bureau.

I am also not new to public safety. I was one of the original members of the Public Safety Bureau leadership team when the Bureau was formed in 2006, and I served for over a decade as a Deputy Bureau Chief. In January 2017, Chairman Pai asked me to serve as Bureau Chief. I have been honored to hold that position since then, and to lead an extraordinarily talented and dedicated team.

In the Bureau, we have our own mission statement: “The FCC’s Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, where the Public’s Safety is Job 1!” That is no empty slogan—we take it very seriously. As the Commission’s primary experts on public safety and homeland security matters, we promote the public’s access to reliable 911, emergency alerting, and first responder communications. We do this in part through regulatory action, but we use other tools as well: we work collaboratively with many partners, including federal, state, and local government; the public safety community, such as NENA and its members; and the communications industry, which plays an essential role. Ultimately, we’re all working toward the same goal of keeping the public safe, and we need to continue to work together.

Now, I’d like to recap for you some of the recent actions we have taken in the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, outline what lies ahead for the rest of this year, and emphasize some lessons learned.

**911 Resiliency During Disasters**

I will start with one of our highest priorities—improving the resiliency of communications networks, and particularly their support for 911, during disasters. You don’t need me to tell you why this is important. After all, the 2019 hurricane season is under way, and we’re in Florida.

Every hurricane season, the Bureau works to support federal, state, and local partners, as well as communications providers, to improve the resiliency of communications networks and to ensure that storm-damaged services are restored as quickly as possible. We also look after the fact at how communications networks fared—what went right, what went wrong—so that we can apply the lessons learned to future preparation and response.

The last hurricane season was typical in this regard. Last fall, Hurricane Michael inflicted tremendous damage on many communities in the Southeastern part of the United States, particularly in the Florida Panhandle, that left residents struggling to recover. Some efforts were successful: as is so often the case in disasters, local PSAPs found a way to persevere. For example, when the Panama City PSAP was unable to take calls, its calls were re-routed to the central Bay County 911 PSAP.  When *that* PSAP became overloaded, calls then flipped over to PSAPs as far away as Tallahassee (three counties and 100 miles away). This underscored a key lesson: redundancy and route diversity are essential to the resiliency of 911 service.

But not everything worked the way it should have. While communications services in most areas affected by Michael were restored within a few days, the recovery was much slower in Bay and Gulf Counties in Florida. At Chairman Pai’s direction, the Bureau undertook an investigation to find out why, and we released our report in May.

In that report, the Bureau found that three key factors led to the unacceptably slow restoration of wireless service in the hardest-hit areas. These were (1) insufficiently resilient backhaul connectivity, (2) inadequate reciprocal roaming arrangements, and (3) lack of coordination between wireless service providers, power crews, and municipalities. Even more concerning, our report found that some providers had not lived up in practice to the principles of the Wireless Resiliency Cooperative Framework, the voluntary commitment that nationwide service providers proposed and committed to abide by in 2016.

We need to do better, and the Bureau is actively looking at the lessons of Hurricane Michael and how best to apply those lessons to future emergencies. Among other initiatives, the Bureau is conducting a comprehensive re-examination of the Wireless Resiliency Cooperative Framework. The 911 community plays a key role in helping to improve the resiliency of communications networks: your input can help us build on successful approaches and develop options to address shortfalls as we prepare for future emergencies.

**911 Reliability**

Maintaining 911 reliability is not just a matter of preparing for hurricanes. Unfortunately, we have also seen 911 service compromised by so-called “sunny-day” outages. The Bureau has investigated and reported its findings on several such outages over the past few years, and we are currently investigating the December 2018 CenturyLink outage.

I won’t comment on the CenturyLink investigation, which is ongoing, but in the past we have found poor planning and system design to be contributing factors to sunny-day outages, particularly where they leave 911 service vulnerable to single points of failure. We have also found that these outages could have been prevented or would have had far less impact if providers had developed and applied network reliability best practices, and if there had been closer coordination between service providers and 911 call centers during outages.

We are committed to working with the 911 community, industry, and other stakeholders to apply lessons learned and help prevent these kinds of outages in the future. We encourage you to give us your ideas, and if you think there’s more that needs to be done, we want to hear from you.

**Kari’s Law, RAY BAUM’s Act, and 911 Rule Consolidation**

In addition to making sure 911 is reliable and resilient, we are very focused on improving 911 availability and location accuracy. In this respect, we got a very substantial boost from Congress last year with the passage of Kari’s Law and RAY BAUM’S Act.

As most of you know, Kari’s Law was enacted in response to the tragic story of Kari Hunt, a Texas woman who was attacked and killed in a hotel room. Kari’s daughter attempted to dial 911 but was unable to do so because she did not know the hotel telephone system required her to dial “9” first to get an outside line. Following that tragedy, many people, including Hank Hunt, Kari’s father, and Chairman Pai, worked for a change in the law to require multi-line telephone systems to support dialing 911 directly, without having to dial a prefix to reach an outside line. A number of states passed such laws, and in February 2018, the federal version of Kari’s Law was passed by Congress and signed by the President.

Shortly after Kari’s Law was enacted, Congress passed RAY BAUM’S Act, which included a provision directing the Commission to consider rules to ensure that “dispatchable location” information—essentially the street address, floor level, and room number of a 911 caller—is conveyed with 911 calls, regardless of the technological platform used.

In September 2018, the Commission proposed rules to implement Kari’s Law. In the same proceeding, responding to the directive in RAY BAUM’S Act, the Commission also proposed dispatchable location requirements for multi-line telephone systems, interconnected VoIP, and other platforms that support 911 calling.  We have received extensive comments, including from NENA, on both issues, and are now hard at work to prepare an order for the Commission’s consideration.

**Vertical Location Accuracy**

We also remain focused on helping emergency responders better locate people who make wireless 911 calls from indoors.  Locating indoor callers is particularly challenging in environments such as large multi-story buildings, where first responders may lose precious time finding the caller’s floor and room.

In 2015, the FCC updated its Enhanced 911 location rules, which require wireless providers to automatically transmit information on the location of wireless 911 calls.  The updated rules require wireless providers to meet an increasingly stringent series of new location accuracy benchmarks that apply to both indoor and outdoor calls, and ideally to provide dispatchable location.

In March of this year, the Commission issued a Further Notice in the Location Accuracy docket to tackle the last open issue from the 2015 order: setting an accuracy metric for identifying a wireless 911 caller’s vertical location (the so-called “z-axis”) in tall buildings. Specifically, the Commission proposed a location accuracy metric of plus or minus 3 meters relative to the handset. If adopted, this metric could be used to comply with the vertical accuracy benchmarks previously established in the Commission’s 2015 order.

This proceeding is very active as we speak. We received initial comments in May, and reply comments are due *tomorrow*, June 18, 2019. So if you have already filed your reply comments, thank you, and if you haven’t, be sure to file them before midnight tomorrow night! **sort byLocatiL**

**Location-Based Routing of 911 Calls**

Another issue we intend to tackle is how to route wireless 911 calls to the correct call center more quickly, which can lead to faster response times.

As many of you know, wireless 911 calls are currently routed to 911 call centers based on the location of the cell tower that handles the call.  But in some cases—for example, if a 911 call is made near a county or a city border—the nearest cell tower may be in a neighboring jurisdiction.  In these cases, the call is routed to a 911 call center in that neighboring jurisdiction, not the call center that serves the caller’s location.  These wireless 911 calls must then be transferred to the proper call center, which can waste valuable time during emergencies.

In March of last year, the FCC launched a proceeding to examine the extent of these “misrouted” wireless 911 calls and ways to route emergency calls more quickly.  In particular, the Commission sought public input on the feasibility of routing wireless 911 calls based on the location of the caller as opposed to the location of the cell tower that handles that call.  We are reviewing the comments in this proceeding and considering how the FCC can best promote wireless 911 call routing improvements.

**Conclusion**

These are just a few of the issues we are working on, and I could list many more, but I want to leave time for our question-and-answer session. In closing, I’d like to thank you again for inviting me, and thank you for the work you do to protect our communities and the nation. Enjoy your time in Orlando!