

**Remarks of Lisa Fowlkes
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-As Prepared for Delivery-

Introduction

It's my pleasure to speak once again at an APCO conference. We at the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau appreciate the leadership role that APCO has taken with respect to so many important public safety issues, and the key contributions you have made in our proceedings and on our advisory committees through the years.

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 stakeholders, including federal, state, and local government; the public safety community, such as APCO and its members; public interest groups; and the communications industry, which plays an essential role. We must all work together to keep the public safe. None of us can do it alone.

With that said, I'd like to report on some of the FCC's key activities during the last year.

Kari's Law and RAY BAUM'S Act

First, there is no higher priority at the FCC than promoting reliable 911 service. Just two weeks ago, the Commission took its latest action to ensure that when the public calls 911, they will reach a 911 call center and can be located quickly by first responders. The Commission did this by adopting an order implementing two significant pieces of 911 legislation: Kari's Law and the "dispatchable location" provision of 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 Kari's father, Hank Hunt, and Chairman Pai, called for multi-line telephone systems, which are common in hotels, businesses, and campuses, to support direct dialing to 911—that is, without having to dial a prefix, such as "9," to reach an outside line. A number of states passed laws with such requirements, and in February 2018, the federal version of Kari's Law was passed by Congress and signed by the President. The law also requires multi-line telephone systems to provide notification, such as to a front desk or security office, when a 911 call is made in order to facilitate building entry by first responders.

The Commission's new rules provide clarity regarding the requirements of Kari's Law so that companies can effectively meet their legal obligations.

In addition, Section 506 of RAY BAUM'S Act gave the Commission an 18-month deadline 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 making the call. We beat Congress's deadline by a month and a half, and the Commission's new rules apply dispatchable location requirements to multi-line telephone systems, as well as fixed telephone service, interconnected Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) services, Telecommunications Relay Services, and mobile texting services. That's a big deal.

Location Accuracy

Meanwhile, the Commission continues to focus on ensuring that 911 call centers get timely and accurate location information for wireless 911 calls. You will recall that in 2015, the Commission updated its wireless 911 rules, which 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.

Last March, the Commission issued a Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking 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." When a dispatchable location cannot be provided, vertical location information can help 911 call centers identify the floor level where the 911 call occurred, which can reduce emergency response times and ultimately save lives.

The Commission proposed that wireless providers meet a vertical location accuracy metric of plus or minus 3 meters relative to the handset, which the carriers would be required to meet if they use z-axis technology to comply with our April 2021 and 2023 deadlines for providing vertical location. We received extensive comments on the proposal, including APCO's comments emphasizing the importance of floor level identification. I can't tell you what the Commission's final decision will be, but I can assure you we are carefully reviewing all of the comments we received in response to this proposal, so stay tuned.

Emergency Alerting

At the same time that so much is happening with 911, this has been just as big a year in emergency alerting. The Commission continues to strengthen the nation's alerting systems, and we are glad to see that APCO has become an active participant in our alerting proceedings. Here are just a few highlights:

Wireless Emergency Alerts

First, this year we will see several enhancements to Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) delivery and message features go into effect. For example:

- Alert originators will soon be able to send longer WEA alert messages—up to 360 characters as opposed to the current 90-character limit—as well as messages in Spanish. Alert originators will be able to conduct end-to-end WEA tests on a consumer opt-in basis without needing a waiver from the FCC. And alert originators will be able to take advantage of a new Public Safety alert message category for conveying recommended actions to the public, such as boil water alerts and shelter

locations. The final step is for FEMA to announce when its IPAWS system is ready to support these enhancements on their end, so we'll all stay tuned for that.

- Some improvements are already in effect. For example, wireless providers must now support "clickable" embedded links in WEA alerts. This means that the recipient of an alert may click on a URL to see a photo of a missing child, for instance.
- And by November 2019, participating wireless providers must improve geo-targeting by delivering alerts with no more than a tenth of a mile overshoot from the affected area specified by alert originators. The Commission adopted this rule to help ensure that alerts are delivered only to intended communities.

You and other public safety stakeholders have told us how important it is that WEA messages be more geographically precise. We understand that alert fatigue is real, and when your alert reaches communities beyond your target area, it can reduce the public's confidence and trust in these warnings.

And, because we share your concern, the Bureau staff has been keeping track of the industry's progress on implementing the geo-targeting requirement. There are indications that industry has been making progress, but our work doesn't end until enhanced geo-targeting is a reality. We are urging industry to keep the momentum going to ensure that the November 30th deadline is met. We know emergency managers need WEA to be a more precise tool, and we ask all stakeholders to continue working together to make sure we get there – and get there by the deadline.

Emergency Alert System

We are also improving the reliability and effectiveness of the Emergency Alert System, which transmits alerts to the public through radio and television. Just a couple of weeks ago, the Commission's rules implementing a series of new EAS improvements went into effect:

- Alert originators may now conduct "live code" EAS tests, using the same codes and processes that would be used in actual emergencies. This can promote greater alert originator proficiency and public preparedness. Importantly, however, our rules require clear messaging and outreach to accompany these tests so that the public knows they are only receiving a test message, not an actual emergency alert.
- To reduce the risk of false alerts, broadcasters, cable systems, and other EAS participants must enable new safeguards in the configuration of EAS equipment. They are also required to notify the Commission if they discover they have transmitted a false alert.

Finally, last Wednesday, FEMA, in coordination with the FCC, conducted the fifth nationwide test of EAS. The goal of this year's test was to assess the readiness of the nation's alerting capability in the absence of Internet capability. In the coming weeks, EAS participants will submit data to the Commission about their experience with the test, which we will analyze to identify any areas for improvement.

911 Resiliency and Reliability

Another of the Bureau's top priorities is promoting the reliability and resiliency of America's communications networks. Needless to say, our goal is for 911 and other communications service to always be there for the public. When major outages do occur, however, such as during disasters, we work with our government partners and industry to support prompt service restoration. We then investigate so that we can apply the lessons learned to future preparation and response.

For instance, 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.

Industry needs to do better, and the Bureau is actively looking at the lessons of Hurricane Michael and other events to determine how best to apply them to ensure that networks remain reliable in the future. 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 outage events.

Conclusion

As you can see, we've had a busy summer in the Bureau, but it's all in the name of advancing our mission to put the public's safety first, and we know that you all are working towards that mission, too. I thank APCO's members for the challenging and important work you do on the front lines of public safety every day. We stand committed to helping you have access to the best communications tools available. I am confident that significant improvements to 911 access and location accuracy, emergency alerting, and first responder communications will continue. But just as APCO's participation has been critical to the formulation of FCC rules and policies, your continued involvement – and that of your local members – is essential to ensure that emergency response improves in all of our communities.

We look forward to working with APCO and the entire 911 and emergency response community to advance the Bureau's mission, where the public's safety is Job 1!

Thank you for letting me speak with you today.