

**TESTIMONY OF JOSE CANCELA
PRESIDENT & GENERAL MANAGER, STATION WKAQ-TV
FCC FIELD HEARING
FEBRUARY 21, 2020
SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO**

1. My name is Jose Cancela. I am President and General Manager of Station WKAQ-TV, San Juan, Puerto Rico. WKAQ, which is part of the NBCUniversal Owned Television Stations Division, offers multiple streams of free over-the-air broadcast programming, including locally produced and Telemundo Network programming on the primary channel, a Spanish-language multicast channel (Punto Dos), and a simulcast of WNBC, New York. The station offers 18 hours of locally produced news programming each week on its primary channel.
2. I would like to thank Commissioner Starks for traveling to Puerto Rico and organizing this important hearing on the resiliency of communications networks in Puerto Rico, and I appreciate the opportunity to highlight the challenges presented by the severe weather events we have faced in recent years.
3. During the first week of September 2017, Hurricane Irma – the first Category 5 hurricane of the 2017 season – put us on notice of what was to come. The government of Puerto Rico declared a state of emergency, and FEMA deployed response teams in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. While Puerto Rico did experience some damage and loss of electrical power, the storm moved north and did not hit us as hard as had been predicted.
4. But two weeks later, on September 20, Hurricane Maria devastated the island. With sustained winds of 155 miles per hour, the storm traversed the island from the southeast to the northwest over an eight-hour period, leveling everything in its path. The entire power grid was destroyed, and 100% of households – more than three million people – were left without electricity.
5. As the storm approached Puerto Rico, we took a number of steps at the station to prepare. Because Puerto Rico is located in a hurricane zone, we have long relied on back-up diesel generators at both the studio and the transmitter site to ensure that the station can stay on the air as long as the basic infrastructure remains intact. We made sure that the fuel tanks at both sites were filled and the generators were functioning properly. To enable the station to provide continuous coverage of the storm, we provisioned our studio with cots, food, and other necessities to serve about 30 people, primarily from the News and Engineering Departments, who stayed at the station round-the-clock.
6. Once the storm hit, we shifted to 100% news coverage and continued to transmit a signal from the studio to our transmitter site at Cerro La Santa, a mountain peak located about 30 miles south of San Juan. However, our monitors showed that we had no over-the-air signal. At that point, we were not able to determine whether we had lost our tower and transmitter. We also knew our viewers had no electricity to power their television sets,

so we live-streamed continuous news coverage on Facebook Live and on the station's website and app. In the immediate aftermath, and given the limited cell service on the island, this information was primarily for the benefit of family and friends living elsewhere who were concerned about their loved ones. Residents who had cell service but no electricity charged their phones in their cars. The station provided 16 days of 24/7 news coverage in this manner.

7. Immediately after the storm, the roads throughout the island were blocked by fallen trees and other debris. Within about three days, however, we were able to travel to the transmitter site, where we learned that the tower and transmitter remained intact, but the receive antenna in our studio-to-transmitter link had been turned around by the high winds and was not receiving the signal from the studio. Once we reoriented that antenna, we were able to restore over-the-air service.
8. Another leading station on the island, WAPA-TV, was not so lucky. That station's tower, transmitter building, and transmitter were all destroyed. WKAQ made one of its multicast channels available to WAPA so the station could continue to broadcast. Ultimately, WKAQ and WAPA entered into an agreement for WAPA, with FCC approval, to install a new antenna on WKAQ's tower, thus allowing WAPA to avoid the delay and cost of rebuilding its tower and transmission facility.
9. We continued to operate both WKAQ's transmitter and studio facilities with the back-up generators for several months until the power grid could be restored. Because the government gave priority to broadcasters along with first responders, hospitals, and other public safety service providers, we were able to replenish our fuel supply.
10. While no one can fully prepare for a Category 5 hurricane, the experience reinforced for us (1) the critical importance of advance preparation, including access to generators; (2) the wisdom of giving broadcasters, as providers of critical information, priority access to fuel; (3) the value of combining broadcast technology and digital platforms (including social media) to reach viewers during weather emergencies; and (4) most importantly, the incredible dedication and bravery of our station employees.

Respectfully submitted,

Jose Cancela