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Federal Communications Commission

National Emergency Number Association
Remarks

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Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. It's a pleasure to be here in Ft. Worth. I bring greetings from Acting Chairman Michael Copps, the FCC Commissioners, and the staff of the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau.

Let me take this opportunity to thank your president, Ron Bonneau, and your Executive Director, Brian Fontes, as well as all of the other NENA staff with whom we work closely in our efforts to improve public safety communications. I also look forward to working with your next President, Craig Whittington, during the coming year.

As you know, this is a time of transition, throughout the country and at the FCC. Indeed, it seems fitting to be speaking with you during DTV transition week, which culminates this coming Friday. Although the DTV transition might seem unrelated to the issues that are the focus of this conference, it is actually emblematic of the way in which major technological changes are affecting the most basic elements of our lives. Dealing with these changes effectively not only requires an understanding of the technical issues involved, but also requires careful planning, good communication, and a spirit of partnership.

Emergency communications present many of the same challenges. We have made significant progress over the last few years in improving many elements of our emergency communications infrastructure. We also have learned from events such as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina the importance of planning and coordination across the public safety community and with our partners in the government and the private sector. In this regard, the work that NENA and its members have done has been exemplary, and I want to tell you that we at the Commission very much appreciate the spirit of cooperation and partnership that you and other public safety associations have shown on many important issues.

But it is not only events like 9/11 and Katrina that challenge us. Many of the issues that bring us here today arise from rapid and sweeping changes in technology that are providing both opportunities and challenges for public safety.

Thanks to the work of many of you in this room, the nation's 911 system performs admirably on a daily basis, and we have vastly extended the reach of the system so that the vast majority of Americans have the ability to use 911 to call for help. The public

has come to depend on 911 emergency calling as a basic public safety service, and expects that it will have access to 911 via both wireline and wireless technology.

The Potential of Broadband

But while the nation's current 911 system still relies to a great degree on decades-old telephony technology, we are in the midst of a fundamental migration from the circuit-switched telephone world to an IP-based world being built on an array of new broadband technologies. These technologies have the potential to be game-changers in many ways, for consumers, for businesses, and for public safety. Therefore, now more than ever, we must consider both the benefits and the challenges that broadband technologies can bring to public safety communications.

We know that by utilizing broadband and other innovative technologies, public safety can assist those who call for help more quickly and efficiently. Indeed, broadband enables us to re-think the concept of the "emergency call" itself. Unlike traditional telephone technology, broadband can handle not only voice, but also text, data, images, and video that are now prevalent and upon

which we increasingly depend. Thus, if PSAPs can utilize broadband technology to a greater extent, and if the public can send texts and transmit images and videos from events and disasters, one can imagine many ways in which we could make emergency response more timely and effective.

For example, if firefighters could receive recent video of a fire scene, or blueprints and other building details as they are responding to calls, they would be better prepared to respond. Or consider the possibilities for law enforcement response if citizens could send video clips or other images from an accident or crime scene to the PSAP, which could then be relayed to officers in patrol cars. PSAPs would be in a better position to determine the resources needed for the response and officers would be better prepared to respond to the situation.

Broadband also offers potential benefits for emergency medical responders, who could share medical data with the hospital while the patient is en route and even retrieve patient records if and when a patient is unable to communicate.

As the saying goes, “knowledge is power” and this is especially true in responding to crises. Broadband technology can give public safety that power and can contribute to the overall safety of the public and first responders. Indeed, these types of applications are already becoming a reality in a few parts of the country. However, they will only become a reality for the nation as a whole if broadband capability becomes more readily available across the country.

This is why one of the most important tasks facing the Commission this year is the creation of a national broadband plan as mandated by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The Act requires, and the Commission has recognized, that public safety broadband issues are a key part of this process. In April, the Commission released a Notice of Inquiry seeking comment on how to implement the plan required by Congress. In the Notice, the Commission included specific questions on how broadband can be used to enhance public safety and homeland security.

The Notice also sought comment on what broadband policies would best promote the deployment of next generation 911 networks, how advancing public safety is interrelated with

improvements in telehealth and telemedicine delivery; how access to broadband capabilities will ensure compatible broadband-based applications and support systems among different public safety agencies; and how cyber security issues are affected by broadband technologies; and strategies for improving network redundancy.

We are pleased to have received a large number of comments in response to the NOI earlier this week, including detailed comments filed by NENA. We are beginning the process of reviewing those comments, and are looking forward to receiving additional reply comments in early July. We expect to maintain a continued dialogue with NENA and others in the public safety community as we consider these critical issues.

Another key piece of the public safety broadband picture is the 700 MHz proceeding. As a result of the DTV transition which occurs two days from now, public safety will at last have unfettered access in the 700 MHz band. Most immediately, this will allow for a new wave of deployment of public safety narrowband systems.

In addition, the Commission remains very focused on the goal of developing a nationwide interoperable broadband network

for public safety in the 700 MHz band. As you know, the Commission previously allocated 10 MHz of commercial nationwide spectrum and 10 MHz of adjacent nationwide public safety spectrum in the 700 MHz band for a shared public safety broadband network. Although the 700 MHz auction did not produce a successful bidder for the commercial block, our staff is actively engaged in a cross-Bureau effort to evaluate and analyze options for 700 MHz to present to the new Chairman and Commissioners.

NENA has been a significant contributor to these proceedings, and we have noted with interest the latest proposal from NENA and APCO to designate LTE as the technical standard for 700 MHz public safety broadband systems. This is a complex issue, and one that has attracted many differing opinions, but we appreciate the efforts that NENA and others in the public safety community are making to achieve consensus on these issues. Fundamentally, we remain committed to ensuring that this spectrum will support nationwide, interoperable, broadband public safety communications.

911 Issues

Let me now turn to some of the other current FCC activities that affect 911 services and PSAPs and how some of these issues have been and will be impacted by new technologies and services.

As you know, the Commission has a pending rulemaking proceeding to develop more refined location accuracy requirements for wireless service providers. As more and more people rely on wireless as their primary means of communication – to the point where in one out of five U.S. households, the wireless phone is the only phone -- it is increasingly important that wireless users not only have access to 911, but also that first responders receive automatic and accurate information to identify the caller's location.

NENA has provided significant leadership on this issue. Last year, NENA and APCO worked together to develop a joint location accuracy proposal with some of the major wireless carriers. Although our broader rulemaking remains pending at this point, the Commission has implemented most elements of this joint proposal in the merger conditions that were adopted for the Verizon-Alltel and Sprint-Clearwire mergers. We expect the new

Commission to take up the broader rulemaking once again in the coming year.

Another proceeding at the Commission concerns the issue of deterring fraudulent and harassing 911 calls made from non-service-initialized handsets. Again, NENA played a crucial role by co-authoring the petition that brought the issue to the Commission's attention. The Commission issued a Notice of Inquiry in April 2008 addressing this issue, and the Public Safety Bureau is currently working towards a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking as a next step.

The Commission also continues to implement various provisions of the NET 911 Act. Last year, pursuant to the Act, the Commission issued rules that gave interconnected Voice-over-Internet-Protocol (VoIP) providers rights of access to any and all network capabilities that are necessary to provide E911 service.

Another task for the Commission under the Act will be to develop a set of PSAP best practices for IP-enabled 911 services. Earlier this year, the Bureau conducted a summit on this issue, and we are now in the process of forming a federal advisory committee, the Communications Security, Interoperability, and

Reliability Council (CSRIC), which will look at these issues, among others.

The NET 911 Act also requires the Commission to provide an annual report to Congress on state collection and use of 911 fees. The Bureau has been gathering data from the states and will be delivering its first annual report to Congress on July 22.

The Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau also works closely with the Commission's Disability Rights Office (DRO) on public safety and 911 issues. A few weeks ago, NENA co-signed a letter recommending a clarification to the Commission's 911 rules for Internet-based relay services. Although the Disability Rights Office takes the lead for the Commission on public safety issues for the deaf and hard of hearing, the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau will continue to provide consultation and support on these issues.

In keeping with our focus on new technology, we expect to remain closely involved in the movement towards Next Generation 911. As I noted earlier, we consider the development of NG 911 to be an important aspect of our evolution towards broadband, and we have sought comment on NG 911 issues in the Broadband NOI.

We are also keenly interested in the ongoing work of NENA, as well as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), to develop a Next-Gen 911 transition plan that examines all aspects of deploying IP-based emergency services across the nation. We stand ready to assist in any way we can to create a more robust 911 system that will support emergency call delivery and accommodate highly mobile, dynamic communication modes.

Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Response

Finally, I'd like to briefly touch on some of the Bureau's activities in connection with disaster preparedness and emergency response. When it's June in Texas, everyone here knows that this means another hurricane season is upon us. Like many of you we have been working hard to get ready, and we are focused on working with our federal, state, local and tribal partners to improve emergency preparedness and response.

One of the new and innovative tools that we plan to use is the new Disaster Information Reporting System (DIRS), which we launched last year. DIRS is a web-based database that is designed to collect daily operational status and restoration information from

the communications industry during disasters and subsequent recovery efforts. Of particular importance to NENA's members, DIRS can help identify PSAPs that have been isolated from 9-1-1 communications networks, which are the essential inbound links that consumers use to reach emergency responders. Participation in DIRS is voluntary, and there are currently nearly 1,700 registered companies with contact information for almost 2,800 individuals. DIRS was activated three times during last year's hurricane season and once so far in 2009 in response to the ice storms in Kentucky. .

Another technological tool we will be using is scanning technology that we call Project Roll Call. We have developed this technology with assistance and funding from FEMA to enhance our situational awareness of the status of communications during and after disasters. In the aftermath of a hurricane or other event, we can deploy Roll Call units in the affected area to determine which radio-based systems are no longer operational. We also can check the Roll Call data against our licensing databases to determine which of these systems support essential personnel, such as first responders. We then provide that information to FEMA, which makes federal resources available to rapidly restore essential communications systems. Project Roll Call proved to be a valuable

tool for federal response efforts during last year's hurricane season, and we will continue to work with FEMA to improve the system this year.

Outreach

As we consider the possibilities created by new technology, however, we must not lose sight of the important fundamentals that I mentioned at the beginning of these remarks: planning, communication, and partnership. This is why we consider outreach to and communication with organizations such as NENA to be as much a priority as the initiatives I discussed earlier. One way that we seek to accomplish this is through our Clearinghouse website, which provides a wealth of information for first responders, 911 Call Centers, the healthcare sector, persons with disabilities and state, local and tribal governments. On this website, we have posted not only information on Commission initiatives but also links to other federal agency resources, guidelines for developing state and local emergency plans, case studies, best practices, and sample emergency plans from jurisdictions around the country. We encourage you to take advantage of the information resources on the website, and help us improve the

website by submitting information that would benefit others in the public safety community.

In addition to providing web-based resources, we also recognize the importance of direct outreach to public safety organizations, industry, and other governmental agencies on a variety of public safety and homeland security communications issues. For example, this week, in addition to DTV transition outreach, several members of our staff, in coordination with FEMA and HHS, are visiting with state and local government officials and public safety representatives in the Gulf Coast Region to learn first-hand about their public safety communications operations and to highlight many of the initiatives that I've mentioned here today.

In conclusion, we face many challenges but also many opportunities to improve the state of emergency communications. We at the Commission look forward to working with NENA and its members, and I am confident that through our continuing partnership, we can and will accomplish great things. On behalf of the FCC and the Bureau staff, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today, and most of all, thank you for your commitment to public safety.