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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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Just over two years ago, tragedy struck an east Texas town. Not only did our community lose a loving mother, daughter, and sister, but the nation also lost trust in a system it relies on in life-threatening circumstances.

In December 2013, Kari Rene Hunt Dunn was murdered by her estranged husband in a hotel room in Marshall, an east Texas city with a reputation for being kind and helpful. Kari's 9-year-old daughter, while witnessing her mother being assaulted and stabbed, did exactly what we train our children to do in an emergency — dial 9-1-1. However, in this case, Kari's daughter could not get through to the authorities because she failed to dial "9" as a prefix to get an outside line.

After Kari's death, I received an outpouring of comments from constituents and other Americans across the country expressing concern over this issue. It was clear that our 9-1-1 system failed at a time of crisis. Every day, scores of people may encounter an emergency, and the last thing they need is confusion over whether or not dialing 9-1-1 will reach emergency responders.

The task of making 9-1-1 standard on all phones throughout the U.S. is a surprisingly simple and achievable task. As it turns out, the more recent multi-line telephone systems (MLTS) can be easily configured or reconfigured to enable callers to reach emergency personnel by dialing 9-1-1, without having to dial a prefix at all. Most of the time, these changes can be made at no cost or very minimal cost. Some MLTS vendors have offered to upgrade or tune-up existing MLTS phone systems for free to accommodate direct dial for 9-1-1.

Additionally, the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AH&LA) has worked aggressively with its many members across the country to swiftly ensure that their systems in place allow guests to directly dial 9-1-1 from guestrooms in the event of an emergency. Some properties across the country have taken steps to upgrade or replace their existing phone systems. Most of AH&LA's largest hotel member chains have activated 9-1-1 direct dial access at nearly all of their owned and managed properties. Further, most of these chains have updated, or are in the process of updating, brand standards to ensure franchisees upgrade their phone systems as well. Led by AH&LA, all of these chains, as well as the broader hotel industry, also have worked hard to educate franchisees and their properties on the need to make the switch as quickly as possible.

These developments are encouraging to say the least. Still, voluntary reform within the hotel industry alone will not bring the uniformity and reliability that hotel guests need while engaging in interstate commerce across the country. Though many hotels which are not within the AH&LA are still insuring 9-1-1 direct dial capabilities, some are not. Though many non-hotel businesses engaging in interstate commerce across the nation have multi-line systems, numerous businesses are not insuring the

9-1-1 capability even though the cost is non-existent or minimal. This risk is still unacceptable. The possibility of even one more person experiencing the horror of not getting help during an emergency when the solution is so amazingly simple is intolerable. That is also why it is quite comforting to know that all hotels owned or managed by Carlson, Hyatt, InterContinental, LaQuinta, Marriott, Motel 6, Starwood and Wyndham now have direct 9-1-1 dialing. Federal Communications Commissioner Ajit Pai is to be commended for his concerned and passionate work in helping bring about such desirable results thus far.

Since the day we lost Kari in 2013, Texas and other states have made significant strides in addressing this issue. Last year, the state of Texas passed a version of Kari's Law, requiring 9-1-1 direct dial to be standardized throughout the state. Eighteen other states also have a similar requirement in place, and five others have begun considering such legislation. Since telephone service truly crosses state lines and is an important part of interstate commerce, this bill, H.R. 4167, will be decisive in making 911 universally accessible in our country. This is the right and necessary course of action to take. Whether Americans pick up a phone in their home state or elsewhere in our country, they assume they can get help when they call 9-1-1. We have an obligation to make that assumption a reality as stewards of American safety and trust.

It might be noted that from behind bars, Kari's killer says that his attack went on over five minutes, but he doubts a 9-1-1 call that got through to emergency personnel would have mattered. The trouble with that comment is that in Marshall, Texas, responses of 2 minutes or less do happen. Additionally, Kari was likely still alive when her assailant left her. A prompt and effective 9-1-1 call, was needed and a nine-year old girl experienced the horror of not getting one through, though she did all she knew to do.

It is also noteworthy that this bill should remove from hotels the risk of potential liabilities. After the need and ease of setting up direct dial for 9-1-1 became known as the industry standard, future tragedies akin to Kari's would likely trigger lawsuits on the part of hotel guests who could not get through to emergency personnel. By requiring hotels and other institutions to fix their phones systems now, this requirement should remove their risk of one day being liable for enormous damages. Businesses and dialers alike will, therefore, benefit from this bill.

Kari's Law takes several concrete steps to bring about this reform. Most basically, it requires 9-1-1 direct dial to be the default configuration for a multi-line telephone system before the phone enters the stream of commerce in the United States. The direct dial requirement will also apply to the installation of a multi-line telephone system, thus protecting the direct dial configuration from being overwritten by a local installer. Finally, the bill provides for a two-year implementation period where the provisions will be phased in. Each of these provisions are created by amending the Communications Act, and, in keeping with that historic legislation, the FCC will retain full authority to enforce the new measures. Such enforcement will allow for civil penalties only to be administered.

The tragic loss of Kari Hunt Dunn and the pain her children suffered spawned a national movement, and that movement has is reaping results, especially by virtue of this bill. Now, Congress needs to act in a final and decisive way to restore security, dependability, and uniformity to our emergency dialing system. This bill will solidify the meaning of 9-1-1 in the minds of our citizens, and it

will earn once again their trust by elevating our emergency dialing standards to match the quality and reliability of first responders across the country.

Thank you for your consideration.



Hon. Louie Gohmert