



COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRATS  
**ENERGY & COMMERCE**  
RANKING MEMBER FRANK PALLONE, JR.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**CONTACT**

Andrew Souvall — (202) 225-5735

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.  
House Energy and Commerce Committee  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
Legislative Hearing on Seven Communications Bills**

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Eshoo. And thank you to all of the witnesses for being here today. I'd like to start by acknowledging that the families of Kari Dunn and Kelsey Smith are in the hearing room and testifying today. I understand that a terrible tragedy has befallen your families. I would like to thank you for your courageous activism on these issues.

Many of the bills we are discussing today deal with public safety issues, which is particularly timely since this is National Public Safety Telecommunications Week.

Telecommunications plays a critical role in public safety, and ensuring people have access to communications services can make all the difference during an emergency. We learned firsthand in New Jersey during Hurricane Sandy that calling for help is difficult when the power is out. And when the cell towers are also down, it is nearly impossible. We need to be better prepared because no one should be left with silence on the other end of the call when they dial 9-1-1.

I'd like to thank Chairman Walden for adding three Democratic bills to today's hearing, including my bill, the Securing Access to Networks in Disasters, called the SANDy Act. The bill has a number of straight-forward proposals that—like the other bills introduced by my Democratic colleagues—should garner bipartisan support. The SANDy Act would recognize the critical role that all communications providers—broadcasters, cable and telecommunications—serve in emergencies, but most notably, the bill would ensure consumers have access to wireless service even if their particular wireless network goes down.

I look forward to hearing more about all the other bills on today's agenda. Unfortunately I must express serious concerns with one bill— H.R. 4884, which would cap the Lifeline program.

In some ways it makes sense that a Lifeline bill is teed up with the other public safety bills we are considering today. Because our phones truly are lifelines—they are the essential lifesaving devices that we keep with us every day.

But unlike the other bills we are considering today that propose ways to improve public safety, the bill to curb the Lifeline program would take essential lifesaving devices away from the people who need help the most. Millions of low-income Americans rely on this program to provide them with the basic communications services that most of us take for granted—like the ability to call 9-1-1. The provisions of H.R. 4884 would gut the Lifeline program by setting a cap, forcing a rapid phase-out of voice services, and preventing the subsidy from being used towards equipment like handsets. Each of these provisions alone would be bad. However, taken together, these provisions will rip phones out of the hands of millions of Americans.

If Republicans truly want to control the costs in the Lifeline program, their blunt force bill is the wrong approach. There is a better way. Let us work together to address inequality; to improve the economy; to find more people jobs. The best way to lower the costs of the program is to lift people up, not to take away their connection to a better life.

I look forward to today's discussion.

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