



**House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Communications and Technology Subcommittee
Hearing on:
“Realizing Nationwide Next-Generation 911”**

March 29, 2017

Statement of the Peace Officers Research Association of California

The Peace Officers Research Association of California (“PORAC”) appreciates the opportunity to provide the Subcommittee with its views on the deployment of Next Generation 911 (“NG911”) in the United States.

PORAC is the largest statewide association representing public safety personnel in the nation, with over 69,000 members. Our members serve in California and Nevada and include active, retired, and reserve municipal police officers and sheriff’s deputies as well as dispatchers, correctional and probation officers, airport police, and other statewide groups. PORAC is dedicated to empowering and representing the interests of rank-and-file peace officers and to protecting the rights of the men and women who keep our nation’s communities safe on a daily basis.

In that spirit, PORAC fully supports improvements to the national emergency 911 system, which is growing increasingly outdated and incompatible with modern technologies. When a person makes a 911 call, it is *the* most important call s/he will likely ever make. Lives are on the line, and the 911 dispatcher must be able to quickly and accurately direct public safety personnel to the scene where assistance is being requested. There is no room for error—every second counts.

The methods dispatchers currently use to ascertain the locations of 911-callers, however, are often inconsistent, inaccurate, and antiquated. PORAC believes that it is time to make NG911 the standard and push the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (“NTIA”) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (“NHTSA”) to catalyze improvements to the 911 grant program.

Outlined below are a number of problems that PORAC members have experienced with the existing 911 and other emergency communications systems, and an explanation as to how NG911 can help mitigate these concerns.

I. Problems with the Existing 911 and Other Emergency Communications Systems



Under the current 911 and emergency communications systems, there exist a number of problems that prevent dispatchers from quickly and accurately locating those in need of assistance. With respect to the 911 system, these problems include:

- Difficulty Locating Wireless Callers. When landlines are used to call 911, the caller's customer data provides the exact address from where the call is placed. When a cell phone is used to contact 911, however, such location information is not available to operators and law enforcement, who are then forced to rely on imprecise techniques (such as triangulating the cell signal) to determine the caller's location.
- Vertical Location Issues. While signal triangulation, GPS, and physical address databases are *sometimes* able to obtain horizontal coordinates and addresses, that technology is currently unable to ascertain the vertical location of 911 callers (i.e., on what floor of a building the caller is located). It is a common scenario for 911 callers to correctly give their address to 911 operators but fail to inform them that they are on a specific floor. When the emergency personnel arrive, they have to try to determine which floor the caller is on, which means critical time is lost.
- Problems with Multi-line Phone Systems. Many multi-line phone systems (such as those used in hotels and office buildings) require the caller to dial a pre-fix number in order to make an outgoing call—even if the call is to 911. This creates problems for callers who are unaware that they must dial a pre-fix number, and disproportionately impacts children because they have usually been taught to simply dial 911 in an emergency.
- Complications with VoIP Calls. Voice Over Internet Protocol (“VoIP”) systems are very reliant on Internet connection and power. If either one or the other were to fail, then there would be no possible way for a caller to use VoIP to contact emergency services. This problem is faced by both callers to 911 and the 911 operators themselves.

In addition to the existing 911 system, other emergency communications systems are in desperate need of updating. For example, many of our districts have struggled with antiquated public safety radio systems. Oakland, California is a perfect example. For years the Oakland radio system failed regularly, putting the lives of Oakland's first responders and citizens in jeopardy. In fact, the problems were on display for all to see when the radio system failed during a high security presidential visit to Oakland in July 2012.¹ However, after diligent work by Oakland City leaders in cooperation with county and state officials and with the aid of federal funding, Oakland was able to transition to a regional public safety communications radio system: the East Bay Regional Communications System Authority. Since that transition finished in July 2016, Oakland Police and Fire Personnel have experienced *zero* radio failures and Oakland's

¹ See Jaxon Van Derbeken, *Oakland Police Radios Fail During Obama Visit* (July 25, 2012), <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Oakland-police-radios-fail-during-Obama-visit-3736022.php>.



ability to access an upgradeable, sustainable, and interoperable radio network has been widely lauded as a huge success for Oakland and the region. While Oakland is a success story, there are still many areas across the country where radio systems need to be updated.

II. NG911 Will Help Save Lives

NG911 would allow for modern day methods of communication—such as smartphones and Internet-enabled devices—to be used to contact 911 services as well as provide dispatchers with more precise and timely location information for all callers. This added integration will allow for emergency responders to arrive on location with a better knowledge and awareness of the situation, increasing both their efficiency and their safety. In meetings PORAC has had with the Federal Communications Commission, the Commission has indicated that updating the antiquated technologies is a very high priority.

In addition to agency action on this critical issue, legislation has also been introduced to address certain shortcomings of the 911 emergency communications system. One such bill that PORAC supports is the Kari's Law Act of 2017 (H.R. 582/S. 123), to require multi-line telephone systems (such as hotel and office telephone systems) to have a configuration that permits users to directly initiate a call to 911 without dialing any additional digit, code, prefix, or post-fix.² PORAC hopes that this important legislation will become law during this Congress.

Finally, unlike many other states, California has its own NG911 plan, signed into law by Governor Jerry Brown in September 2014.³ The bill requires the state's Office of Emergency Services ("OES") to develop a plan and timeline of target dates for testing, implementing, and operating a NG911 system, including a text to 911 service, throughout California. The implementation process, however, has been slow and additional funding is needed in order to fully implement NG911 across the state. Nevada is similarly struggling to implement its NG911 systems. In addition to the benefits that state-level boards can provide to facilitate the NG911 transition, PORAC believes that greater federal oversight of the process is also needed.

III. Conclusion

As law enforcement officers are often first responders, PORAC strongly supports all updates and changes to the 911 system that would allow for 911 callers to more easily access the emergency communications system, as every moment that it takes before emergency services

² In the House, the Kari's Law Act was introduced by Representative Louie Gohmert (R-TX) and passed 408-0 on January 23, 2017. The Senate version was introduced by Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) and is awaiting further legislative action in the Senate.

³ See SB 1211 (Sept. 30, 2014), available at http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/13-14/bill/sen/sb_1201-1250/sb_1211_bill_20140930_chaptered.html.



reach victims is a moment in which dire situations can worsen. PORAC also generally supports additional funding to support the NG911 transition.

PORAC appreciates the Subcommittee holding a hearing on this matter, and stands ready to serve as a resource as Congress works with federal agencies to ensure that NG911 becomes a reality.