

**Opening Statement of Honorable Marsha Blackburn  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
Hearing on “Realizing Nationwide Next-Generation 911”  
March 29, 2017**

*(As prepared for delivery)*

Welcome to the Communications and Technology Subcommittee’s hearing titled: “Realizing Nationwide Next-Generation 911.” Also, thank you to our witnesses for appearing here today to offer your expertise.

The evolution in communications technology continues to change the lives of Americans, and for the better. The transition to the Internet Protocol technology underlying Next Generation 911 service from the circuit-based networks of yesterday is a compelling example of this. Traditional 911 services permitted a voice call through the local phone company’s switch to be transferred directly to a Public Safety Answering Point or “PSAP. Next Gen 911 takes advantage of the robust capabilities of today’s and tomorrow’s digital networks and will allow that lifesaving call to take the form of voice, text, or video from any wired, wireless, or IP based device routed over a broadband network.

Realizing NG911 services throughout the Nation is critical, but as with any large-scale transition there are challenges that must be overcome. Issues regarding such matters as funding, governance, ensuring the security of the network are but a few. The cost will be significant. Yet while funding is a challenge, studies reveal a troubling pattern whereby some states divert money collected from consumers intended for 911 services that could assist with the NG911 transition. The FCC reports that approximately \$220 million – or 8.4 percent of the total amount of fees collected by the states to fund 911 was diverted for non 911 purposes in 2015. Every member of this Committee should agree to work together to tackle this issue aggressively.

Our witness from the state of Indiana, Mr. Bitter tells us in his testimony that a state’s approach to governance is an important component of a successful transition. The majority memorandum notes that approximately half of the states have established 911 boards or similar entities. I look forward to a better understanding of how a “centralized command” may facilitate the transition.

And we are all aware that these IP-based networks will be vulnerable to cyber-attack. The FCC has said that additional work must be done to protect these networks, including encrypting data to ensure the “integrity” of traffic. What more can be done? What is the best approach as we move forward?

With that said, we should recognize that this transition is underway and these challenges are not insurmountable. According to an FCC report, twelve states report that NG911 is operational in 100 percent of the state – my home state of Tennessee among them. A solid start for our Nation but well short of where I think we need to be.

We have taken steps to facilitate the transition. Most recently, in 2012, this Committee, under the leadership of Chairman Walden, was instrumental in passage of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act which not only created FirstNet to bring state-of-the art communications capabilities to our Nation’s first responders, but also sought to further the NG 911 transition. In addition, to more in grant funding, we called for a study of the costs to move to NG911 and annual reports to keep us informed of progress. Unfortunately, we are still waiting. Republicans and Democrats can both agree that having a modern 911 emergency response system in place is a national necessity. As our witnesses today share their stories and expertise, we have an opportunity to learn what works best, what is most efficient, and what will get us there quickly. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. Thank you.