

**Opening Statement of Honorable Marsha Blackburn
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “Future of Emergency Alerting”
May 17, 2017**

(As prepared for delivery)

Good morning and welcome to the Communications and Technology Subcommittee’s hearing titled: the “Future of Emergency Alerting.” How important a topic is this? The first abducted child to be rescued by an Amber Alert back in 1998 is about to graduate from high-school. Congratulations to Ms. Rae Leigh Bradbury of Fort Worth. And let me thank our witnesses for appearing here today to offer your expertise.

This Committee’s commitment to advancing public safety communications is well established. Recently, FirstNet announced the award of a contract to AT&T that will bring state-of-the-art interoperable broadband communications to our Nation’s First Responders. The legislation that got us there reflects the bipartisan work of this Committee under Chairman Walden’s leadership. The Committee examined Next Generation 911 services and listened to testimony regarding the challenges and benefits of bringing the robust capabilities of IP-based technology to our nation’s Public Safety Answering Points. This morning we have an opportunity to hear about a third critical component of public safety communications -- emergency alerting.

Outfitting first responders with the robust capabilities of broadband communications is essential. In those times when catastrophe looms and the lives of hundreds, thousands, even millions -- are at risk or a child is missing, the necessity of ensuring the best available tools are available to local, state and federal authorities to alert the public cannot be understated.

We all know stories – tornadoes ripping through the heartland, hurricanes devastating our coasts, earthquakes, even acts of terrorism weigh heavy on our collective consciousness of just how dangerous the world can be. Where do we find comfort – with the knowledge that those that have dedicated their lives to protecting ours are able to notify us and steer us from harm’s way.

How do they go about doing this?

This morning we will hear about the emergency alert system – EAS -- a broadcast-based mechanism that has been around for decades and serves as the nation’s primary alerting tool. Recently, FEMA and its partners performed a nationwide test -- the second in its history. We will hear about the outcome and lessons learned.

We will be introduced to a new television broadcast transmission standard -- ATSC 3.0 that the broadcast television industry has sought authorization from the FCC to deploy. Among other things, it appears to offer capabilities that could bring significant improvements to emergency alerting. I’d like to understand what they are and how they impact EAS.

We will hear about Wireless Emergency Alerts - the mechanism that brings us alerts through our mobile devices. Mr. Shimkus was the lead sponsor of the WARN Act, the legislation that established that mechanism in 2006. Since then we have come to increasingly rely on our smart phones. Today we will hear how continued technological innovation promises to make WEA a more significant component of alerting.

Finally, we will explore the role of social media. We have seen first-hand the power of Twitter and Facebook as well as others in this space. Yet, while social media has been used as a tool by public safety, there are concerns regarding such things as trustworthiness and security.

Having the most effective means to reach our citizens in times of emergency is a goal we all share. Today’s panel will inform us on what is and what might be, as the nation’s alerting capabilities evolve. Thank you.