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ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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MEMORANDUM

To: Members, Energy and Commerce Committee
From: Majority Staff
Re: Communications and Technology Subcommittee Hearing

I. INTRODUCTION

On Tuesday, December 16, 2025, at 10:15 a.m. (ET), the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology will hold a hearing in 2123 Rayburn House Office Building entitled, "Legislative Improvements to Public Safety Communications in the United States." The following witnesses are expected to testify:

II. WITNESSES

- Captain Jack Varnado, President of APCO International and 9-1-1 Director of Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office
- Ms. Jennifer Manner, Senior Vice President of Regulatory Affairs and International Strategy, AST SpaceMobile
- Mr. Matthew Gerst, Partner, Wilkinson Barker Knauer, LLP
- Ms. Jeannette Sutton, PhD, Associate Professor of the College of Emergency Preparedness, Homeland Security and Cybersecurity, University at Albany

III. BACKGROUND

The first 911 call was placed in February 1968, in Haleyville, Alabama, transforming public safety communications forever.[1] The benefits of the three-digit number were quickly recognized, and adoption was encouraged throughout the United States. By the end of the 20th century, Congress had designated 911 as the official universal emergency number, and nearly 93 percent of the United States had access to it.[2]

[1] NATIONAL EMERGENCY NUMBER ASSOCIATION, *9-1-1 Origin & History*, www.nena.org/page/911overviewfacts, (last accessed Dec. 9, 2025).
[2] 47 U.S. Code § 251(e)(3).

Since then, significant advancements in communications networks and technology have driven upgrades to the 911 system. The introduction of Enhanced 911 (E911) services enabled the transmission of location data with emergency calls—first for landlines, and later for wireless devices.[3] The rise of the internet paved the way for Internet Protocol (IP) based 911 services and the development of Next Generation 911 (NG911) technology. Once fully deployed, this technology will equip first responders with better tools to more effectively perform their jobs.

IV. SELECTED ISSUES

A. Next Generation 911

A Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) is a center established to send and receive 911 calls.[4] Due to advancements and innovation in public safety technology, PSAPs across the country are transitioning from traditional analog emergency communications systems to more advanced NG911 technology.[5] These new systems use IP-based technology which allows for more advanced features and capabilities beyond standard voice calls, including the ability to process additional types of data such as text messages, images, and video. PSAPs with these advanced capabilities can integrate sophisticated technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) to sort non-emergency traffic, effectively helping human call takers to prioritize critical calls during periods of high volume.[6] As large language models progress, they could be utilized for real-time translation between different languages, further assisting both call takers and first responders in the field.[7]

A major component of NG911 equipped facilities is the ability to interconnect to other call centers. Interconnection can allow calls to be seamlessly transferred between PSAPs, increasing redundancies and ensuring that 911 calls can still be answered in the event of an outage or natural disaster.[8] However, as PSAPs transition to NG911 services and IP-based systems, they face a heightened risk of cyberattacks; therefore, robust cybersecurity measures should accompany upgrades.[9]

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[3] FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION, *911 and E911 Services*, www.fcc.gov/general/9-1-1-and-e9-1-1-services (last accessed Dec 9, 2025).
[4] Jill C. Gallagher, *Next Generation 911 Technologies: Select Issues for Congress*, CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE (Jul. 9, 2018), www.congress.gov/crs-product/R45253.
[5] *Id.*
[6] James Careless, *Filling the PSAP Gap with AI-Enabled ViizViital,* ALL THINGS FIRSTNET (Apr. 9, 2025), allthingsfirstnet.com/filling-the-psap-gap-with-ai-enabled-viizviital/.
[7] James Careless, *FirstNet Webinar Spotlights the Power of AI for Helping Public Safety,* ALL THINGS FIRSTNET (Mar. 13, 2025), allthingsfirstnet.com/firstnet-webinar-spotlights-the-power-of-ai-for-helping-public-safety/.
[8] Jill C. Gallagher, *Next Generation 911 Technologies: Select Issues for Congress*, CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE (Jul. 9, 2018), www.congress.gov/crs-product/R45253.
[9] *Id.*; CYBERSECURITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY AGENCY, *Emergency Service Sector Landscape* (Nov. 2023), www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-01/ess-landscape_112023_508.pdf.

A 2018 report completed by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimated that full deployment of NG911 would cost between $9.5 and $12.7 billion.[10]

B. Emergency Alerts

The Integrated Public Alert & Warning System (IPAWS) is the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) national system for local alerting, designed to provide authenticated, life-saving information to the public. The system delivers critical messages across multiple platforms, including radio and television via the Emergency Alert System (EAS), mobile phones using Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEAs), and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Weather Radio.[11]

The EAS serves as a national public warning system, enabling state and local authorities to deliver important emergency information like weather warnings and AMBER alerts to affected communities over television and radio.[12] This system's principal purpose is also to provide the President of the United States with the capability to address the American people within 10 minutes during a national emergency.[13] Broadcast, cable, and satellite operators are the stewards of this public service, working in close partnership with state, local, tribal, and territorial authorities.[14] FEMA, in partnership with the FCC and NOAA, is responsible for implementing, maintaining, and operating the EAS at the federal level. Most EAS alerts originate from the National Weather Service in response to severe weather events, but an increasing number of state, local, territorial, and tribal authorities also send alerts. In addition, the NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards network, the only federally sponsored radio transmission of warning information to the public, is part of the EAS.[15]

WEAs are short emergency messages from authorized federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial public alerting authorities that can be broadcast from cell towers to any WEA-enabled mobile device in a locally targeted area. Wireless providers primarily use cellular broadcast technology for WEA message delivery. WEAs can be sent to mobile devices when someone may

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[10] NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION, NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION, *Next Generation 911 Cost Estimate, A Report to Congress* (Oct. 2018), www.911.gov/assets/Next_Generation_911_Cost_Estimate_Report_to_Congress_2018-1638220685.pdf.
[11] FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, *Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS), Process Map Playbook, Version 2.0* (Feb. 2023), www fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_ipaws-process-playbook-version-2.pdf.
[12] FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION, *The Emergency Alert System (EAS)* (last accessed Dec. 9, 2025), www fcc.gov/emergency-alert-system.
[13] FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, *Emergency Alert System* (last accessed Dec 9, 2025), www fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system/public/emergency-alert-system.
[14] *Id.*
[15] *Id.*

be in harm's way, without the need to download an app or subscribe to a service. WEAs are short messages that warn the public of an impending natural or human-made disaster.[16]

C. Other Issues

Recent network outages have negatively affected cellular networks nationwide and hindered the ability of individuals to contact 911 services.[17] Under FCC rules, outages that last longer than 30 minutes must be reported to the FCC within 2 hours and a final report must be submitted within 30 days.[18] In the case of communications disruptions due to disasters, the FCC activates the Disaster Information Reporting System (DIRS) to allow providers to report infrastructure status and request assistance. A final report must be submitted to the FCC within 24 hours of the deactivation of DIRS.[19]

The Kari's Law Act of 2017 (Kari's Law) requires multi-line telephone systems (MLTS), like those found in office buildings, large campuses, and hotels, have direct dialing to 911 instead of requiring a prefix digit, such as "9" to reach an outside line.[20] Starting on February 16, 2020, any MLTS manufactured, installed, imported, sold, or leased must comply with Kari's Law requirements. Kari's law is named after Kari Hunt, who was murdered in a motel room in 2013. Kari's 9-year-old daughter was unable to reach 911 because she did not know dialing "9" was required to make outbound calls.[21]

V. RELATED LEGISLATION

A. H.R. 6505, Next Generation 9-1-1 Act (Rep. Hudson and Carter (LA))

This bill would establish a grant program at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and outlines the responsibilities of the Assistant Secretary for administering the program. It would also establish a nationwide Next Generation 911 Cybersecurity Center and a Next Generation 911 Advisory Board.

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[16] FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, *Wireless Emergency Alerts* (last accessed Dec 9, 2025), www fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system/public/wireless-emergency-alerts.
[17] Jill C. Gallagher; Colby Leigh Pechtol, *AT&T Network Outage: Impact on Public Safety Services*, CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE (Mar. 13, 2024), www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF12613.
[18] FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION, *Network Outage Reporting System (NORS)* (last accessed Dec. 10), 2025), https://www fcc.gov/network-outage-reporting-system-nors.
[19] FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION, *Disaster Information Reporting System (DIRS)* (last accessed Dec. 10, 2025), https://www fcc.gov/general/disaster-information-reporting-system-dirs-0.
[20] FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION, *Multi-line Telephone Systems – Kari's Law and RAY BAUM'S Act 911 Direct Dialing, Notification, and Dispatchable Location Requirements* (last accessed Dec. 9, 2025). https://www.fcc.gov/mlts-911-requirements.
[21] *id.*

B. H.R. 5200, Emergency Reporting Act (Reps. Matsui and Bilirakis)

This bill would direct the Federal Communications Commission to issue reports after activation of the Disaster Information Reporting System and to make improvements to network outage reporting.

C. H.R. 5201, Karis Law Reporting Act (Reps. Matsui and Bilirakis)

This bill would direct the Federal Communications Commission to publish a report on implementation of the Kari's Law Act of 2017.

D. H.R. 2076, LuLu's Law (Rep. Palmer)

This bill would require the Federal Communications Commission to issue an order providing that a shark attack is an event for which a wireless emergency alert may be transmitted.

E. H.R. ___, Mystic Alert Act (Rep. Pfluger)

This bill would require the FCC to issue a rulemaking establishing standards and protocols to enable satellite alerting capabilities for commercial mobile service providers that transmit emergency alerts.

F. H.R. 1094, Amateur Radio Emergency Preparedness Act (Rep. Pfluger)

This bill would amend the Communications Act of 1934 to prohibit the application of certain private land use restrictions to amateur station antennas on property controlled by an amateur radio operator.

G. H.R. 1519, Public Safety Communications Act (Rep. Cammack)

This bill would codify the Office of Public Safety Communications at the National Telecommunications and Information Administration and would establish duties of the office.

VI. KEY QUESTIONS

- Do first responders have the communications tools necessary to do their jobs effectively?
- What improvements can be made to the public safety communications ecosystem?
- What does the future of public safety communications look like?

VII. STAFF CONTACTS

If you have any questions regarding this hearing, please contact Michael Essington or Dylan Rogers of the Committee Staff at (202) 225-3641.