

Opening Statement of Republican Leader Robert E. Latta
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Strengthening Communications Networks to Help Americans in Crisis”
February 27, 2020

As Prepared for Delivery

Good morning, and welcome to today’s hearing to discuss a variety of public safety-related bills. I want to thank our witnesses for sharing their experiences with us on dealing with the day-to-day challenges associated with the concepts in these legislative proposals.

Public safety communications provide an important lifeline to consumers, and as we make advancements in technology we must be careful to make sure transitions are done thoughtfully, are transparent, and have public input. While many of the bills before us have good intentions to improve the resiliency of our emergency communications systems, we must ensure these bills receive proper attention so that their goals are achieved.

First, the Subcommittee is examining H.R. 1289, the PHONE Act, which would provide a moratorium on number reassignment after a natural disaster. I think we can all agree that consumers shouldn’t lose their phone number after their home is destroyed from a fire or hurricane. But whatever remedy we use to protect consumers must be manageable for companies that provide voice service to tens of millions

of consumers. Without taking that into account, we could cause more confusion for Americans already reeling from disaster. If there is a concern with the Commission's current process for obtaining a waiver of the aging rule, that is something we should learn more about. I believe these and other challenges can be overcome, and I am committed to working with my friends in the Majority to see if there is a path forward. However, I caution against moving such important legislation without due consideration under regular order.

I am pleased that we are considering the FIRST RESPONDER Act, which repeals the T-Band auction mandate while addressing the issue of 9-1-1 fee diversion by states, as well as my colleague from New York's bill, Don't Break Up the T-Band Act. These bills address critical, bipartisan issues that if not addressed put the entire 9-1-1 and public safety systems at risk.

We are also here to discuss H.R. 4194, the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act. Last Congress, this Committee unanimously passed the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act, which tasked the FCC with studying whether to designate an "N-1-1" 3 digit short-code for the national suicide prevention Lifeline. Chairman Pai has announced his intention to move ahead on designating 9-8-8. I applaud this decision, and I was pleased to host the Chairman recently in Toledo,

Ohio to visit Rescue Mental Health and Addiction Services – a National Suicide Prevention Lifeline crisis center. At the center, we learned the number of hotline calls that needed answering in Ohio increased by 70% from 2016 to 2018. With suicide rates growing in nearly every state, the need for prevention services has never been greater. We must ensure resources, like 9-8-8, are available for at risk Americans to get the help they need.

I look forward to reviewing all the bills under consideration and hearing from our panelists. Thank you, and I yield back.