

**Opening Statement of Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on “Strengthening Communications Networks to Help
Americans in Crisis”**

February 27, 2020

Today the Subcommittee is considering a number of important bills to improve communications networks, particularly in times of emergency. The fact is that climate change is causing more frequent and more severe disasters, and a functioning communications network can be the difference between life and death in these situations. We have a responsibility to ensure our networks are prepared for this stark reality.

One of the bills we’re considering today is the RESILIENT Networks Act, which I introduced with Representative

McNerney. This legislation picks up where the SANDy Act left off and will ensure that communications networks are prepared for the worst when disaster strikes.

When networks go down, it is critical that providers share information about outages and restoration efforts with 9-1-1 call centers and first responders. They need access to outage reports to better keep us safe. I want to thank the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) for letting us know about the need to address this issue. And I'd like to request unanimous consent to enter a letter from APCO into the record.

The RESILIENT Networks Act also makes certain that providers have pre-planned roaming agreements and mutual aid arrangements in place ahead of time. This coordination can mean the difference between life and death.

When a storm or wildfire strikes, it is essential that people can still make calls to 9-1-1 or to loved ones. Service is also critical to receiving emergency alerts that provide lifesaving information. In an instance where one carrier's network is working and another's goes down, having a plan in place beforehand to seamlessly transition subscribers onto the working network is common sense, and can save lives.

Perhaps the most frustrating challenge of all is outages that happen during the recovery phase, after storms or disasters have passed. Far too many networks go down due to accidental cuts into the networks when restoration efforts are well underway. Our bill directs the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to examine ways to stop these preventable outages, and I look forward to seeing the results of their analysis.

I am also pleased that the National Suicide Hotline Designation Act is listed for consideration today, and thank Representatives Stewart, Moulton, and Eddie Bernice Johnson for their leadership on this issue. Every day, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline saves lives—and reports from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the FCC say making 9-8-8 the dialing code for the Lifeline will save more. This bill will make it easier for people experiencing a mental health crisis to access help.

In my state of New Jersey, 100 young people aged 15 to 24 died by suicide in 2017—the highest number and rate since the 1990s.

Tragically, rates are climbing across the board at the national level too. The statistics are particularly alarming for

LGBTQ youth, who are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers. According to the Trevor Project's National Survey, 39 percent of LGBTQ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including more than half of transgender or nonbinary youth.

It is vital that we do all that we can to turn back these trends.

Finally, I want to thank Ranking Member Walden and Representatives Engel, Eshoo, McNerney, Matsui, and Thompson for their important work on other bills being considered today.

I'd like to yield the remainder of my time to Rep. Matsui.