Opening Statement of Subcommittee Ranking Member Mike Doyle
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing on "Realizing Nationwide Next-Generation 911"
March 29, 2017

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today, and thank you Madam Chairman for calling this hearing.

The future of 9-1-1 systems in this country is a critical issue. As we move forward with the development of the national public safety broadband network for first responders, we need to recognize the importance 9-1-1 service and the need for modernization for both the people who make 9-1-1 calls and those who respond to them.

While Congress has allocated billions in funding and spectrum to leverage the construction and deployment of FirstNet, we have only allocated $115 million for Next Gen 9-1-1.

While states and localities have an important role to play, we need to ensure that they have a strong partner in the federal government that is able to direct funding, expertise, and scale at this challenge.

I'm disappointed that we are sitting here today without a clear idea of how much upgrading our nation's 9-1-1 infrastructure will cost or what the ongoing costs will be of sustaining world class 9-1-1 infrastructure throughout the country. I think what's clear is that the current funding mechanisms are not sufficient to meet current needs or to fund the next generation of upgrades.

I would call on the majority to work with us to advance legislation to address these issues.

While I commend the work done by the witnesses here to attack this problem, we need national solutions because citizens will not adopt these new technologies if they are not uniformly deployed and uniformly functional on a national basis.

We are far past the time when localities should have a patchwork of solutions where some accept text messages, pictures, and videos - and others are working with technology from the 70s.

Smart phones and smart devices are the present and future of emergency communications. As the testimony shows, the future of Next Gen 9-1-1 are vehicle collision notifications being sent to 9-1-1 call centers, and companies like Nest and other smart home safety and security products warning consumers about incidents in their homes. We need to be sure that both consumer, commercial, and municipal I-o-T infrastructure can communicate effectively with first responders.

Recently there have been a number of 9-1-1 outages in our country. This month, roughly 46 million AT&T customers lost access to 9-1-1 service for five hours. Approximately, 12,600 people tried to dial 9-1-1 and weren't able to get through.

Those customers were not given warning or information about the cause or remedy for this outage.

More than AT&T's outage, in Dallas a call center was overwhelmed by abandoned 9-1-1 calls, and we have reports of similar cases throughout the country. Some of these instances seem due to understaffing, while with others the root causes are still not clear. What is clear is that we are still facing challenges in places meeting basic service standards.

I'd just add that compromised smart phones have already been used to attack the nation's 9-1-1 system. And as the witnesses point out, moving the 9-1-1 system to an I-P based system opens call centers up to great cyber-security challenges.

Deploying Next Gen 9-1-1 services isn't just about expanding the ways people access emergency services, it's also about making these services more redundant, more reliable, and more useful. I hope this hearing is educational to our members, and I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses.

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