

Opening Statement
Chairman Frank Pallone, Jr.
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Markup of 11 Bills
March 10, 2020

Today, we are marking up legislation that will make Americans safer, media more reflective of our nation's diverse views, and hopefully increase access to broadband and 9-1-1 services for urban and rural areas.

Improving public safety in the communications sector requires reliable and resilient networks. These networks are critical to ensuring that people can reach out for help during times of emergency. They are also critical to first responders who need to be able to communicate with each other. Hurricanes, wildfires, and tornados are inevitable. And despite the best efforts of communications providers, networks will go down, and therefore we must be prepared.

H.R. 5926 – the RESILIENT Networks Act — which I introduced with Representative McNerney would minimize disruptions to networks, public safety, and the customers that rely upon them when outages do occur. It would require more pre-planning and coordination among communications providers to enable customers of one provider to use the networks of another provider during an emergency if their network is down. It also would increase information sharing between providers and first responders so 9-1-1 call centers would be able to identify areas unable to call for help and proactively work with first responders to aid people at risk.

We've been having bipartisan discussions on this bill since January, and while we haven't yet reached bipartisan agreement, I look forward to continuing the ongoing conversations as we move to full committee. After a disaster is over, it is also important to learn from them and H.R. 5918, introduced by Representative Matsui, would do exactly that. It requires the FCC to issue a report recommending how to improve the resiliency of networks each time the FCC activates the Disaster Information Reporting System.

We are also improving alerts for consumers in times of emergency with the "READI Act."

Representative Mike Thompson's "PHONE Act" will ensure Americans who have lost everything in a fire, tornado or other disaster won't also lose their phone number. Providers would be prohibited from reassigning phone numbers following certain disasters so that families are able to focus on loved ones and rebuilding and not their phone company. This is the right thing to do, and I hope this legislation will garner bipartisan support.

Communications among first responders is also critical to public safety. I commend Representative Engel for his leadership on this issue and look forward to advancing his legislation to preserve the T-Band for public safety as supported by law enforcement and the FCC. I'm pleased that Ranking Member Walden has an amendment to this legislation that, if adopted, will overcome his concerns about this repeal.

We are also marking up legislation to promote media diversity. If the people making decisions about the content we see and hear do not have a diversity of perspectives, the news, storytelling, and entertainment we see will not represent the incredible melting pot of our great nation.

Representative Butterfield's "Expanding Broadcast Ownership Opportunities Act" would bring back the successful tax certificate program to promote minority and female ownership, which is sorely lacking. We will also consider Representative Clarke's legislation that would require the FCC to finally collect diversity data it should have been gathering for years.

Finally, we are taking up H.R. 4855, the "C-Band Act", sponsored by Chairman Doyle along with Representatives Matsui, Johnson, and Gianforte. C-band spectrum is essential mid-band spectrum that can be used to speed up our efforts to implement new wireless technologies like 5G.

The FCC is moving forward to auction this spectrum based on a stretching of existing law that is highly suspect. It is incumbent on Congress to provide legal certainty that will speed deployment of 5G and direct the spending of auction proceeds to important bipartisan priorities, like broadband deployment and adoption and next-generation 9-1-1. The bill we are moving forward today is just a place holder so that we can continue our bipartisan negotiations to produce legislation that does just that. I hope that we can find a bipartisan solution but one way or another Congress must ensure the American people benefit from the public airwaves and not just foreign satellite operators.

There are several other important bills we are considering today, such as a bill that would establish 9-8-8 as the universal dialing code for the Suicide Hotline with the "National Suicide Hotline Designation Act."

I thank all of the members for their work in getting those bills to this markup. I look forward to continuing our discussions and hope that we can advance all of them out of Committee on a bipartisan basis.