



COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY & COMMERCE
DEMOCRATS
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Pallone's Remarks at Legislative Hearing on Communications Bills

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Communications and Technology hearing titled, "Legislative Hearing on Four Communications Bills:"*

Our hearing today will examine four bipartisan communications bills. Though communications is the thread that binds them all, they each touch on vastly different, but important, issues.

First, I am pleased we are considering the National Suicide Hotline Improvement Act of 2017, which aims to quickly connect individuals experiencing a mental health crisis with a professional. Suicide is the tenth leading cause of death for people of all ages, and every year hundreds of thousands of people are injured in attempted suicides or other mental health emergencies. This bill would require the Federal Communications Commission to study how to establish a nationwide three-digit number to access the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. With rates of suicide increasing each year, we must do all we can to get support services to those in need. I'd like to thank one of our witnesses, Mr. Madigan, for all the important work you do with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, and thanks also for being with us today.

We will also be discussing the Rural Reasonable and Comparable Wireless Access Act, introduced by Congressmen Welch and McKinley. This bill would shine a light on the quality of voice and broadband services offered in rural areas. It would direct the FCC to examine whether people in rural communities actually receive the same level of service as those in urban areas. The FCC has talked a lot over the past year about improving connections in rural areas. This bill would require the FCC to collect and analyze the facts on the ground to make sure that it is actually getting the job done.

I'm also glad that we will be discussing the problems caused by "pirate" radio broadcasters—people who broadcast illegally on our public airwaves. Pirate broadcasters flout the law and interfere with the licensed broadcasters who follow the law. These pirate broadcasts can be frustrating for people, but more critically, they prevent people from hearing important

communications and public safety information in times of emergency. That is simply unacceptable. I look forward to hearing about ways that we can work to solve this problem.

Finally, we will discuss the Small Entity Regulatory Relief Opportunity Act. While I certainly appreciate the difficulties faced by small businesses across the country, I have concerns with the ways this bill would try to solve these problems. The bill would allow the FCC to roll back or delay consumer protections for subscribers of telecommunications and cable companies that serve as many as 6.5 million customers—these supposedly small businesses could be larger than 35 states. And many of the millions of customers of the providers have few or no choices.

But aside from size, given the current FCC's animosity for consumer protections, I do not think this is the right time for Congress to encourage the agency to strip away more safeguards for millions of people. We would be better off figuring out ways to better protect the American people.

I look forward to the discussion today and hearing from all of the witnesses before us. Thank you.

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