Written Testimony of
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Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
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Thank you, Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, and members of the subcommittee. I am honored to be here to testify.

I have spent most of my 40-plus-year career in wireless communications. That time has included both government and private sector roles, such as serving as an Ambassador, Chief of Staff at the Federal Communications Commission, and holding senior positions at AT&T, CTIA, and, until recently, as CEO of NENA – The 9-1-1 Association. But today, I speak to you as a private citizen – concerned about the future of the 9-1-1 system and those who work tirelessly every day to help those in need.

My goals today are clear: I ask Congress to support the dedicated 9-1-1 professionals by reclassifying them as what they have long-proven to be, Public Safety Professionals, and to fully fund the Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) system.

Mr. Chairman, our 9-1-1 professionals are currently misclassified as *administrative or clerical* staff, similar to receptionists or secretaries, rather than as *public safety personnel* like their colleagues in law enforcement. This misclassification is another relic of legacy 9-1-1 systems—when the public called, 9-1-1 answered, and just dispatched.

Today, they do much more.

They handle medical triage, such as CPR, and provide crucial situational awareness for field responders. They undergo rigorous training to learn the many standards, technologies, and procedures they must follow.

Representative Torres, a former dispatcher herself, and Representative Fitzpatrick—along with Senators Blackburn and Klobuchar—have long championed the 9-1-1 SAVES Act. This zero-cost bill would reclassify 9-1-1 telecommunicators as what they are, Public Safety Personnel. These professionals support us during our most harrowing moments and share in the trauma we face at that time. As such, they deserve to be recognized alongside their colleagues in field response as Public Safety Personnel.

Why is this important?

Aside from recognizing the life-saving work they do, this misclassification led to 9-1-1 professionals not having access to personal protective equipment during the COVID pandemic. Furthermore, many telecommunicators coordinate field responders and operate with them in the field.

Now, let me talk about the urgent need for the NG9-1-1 system.

The 9-1-1 system is often the first point of contact between citizens and emergency field responders. We are told that *If You See Something, Say Something*, and when that *something* is seen, 9-1-1 is typically called. In today's world of school shootings, man-made and natural disasters, 9-1-1 serves as the first triage and coordinator of responses. Many of the nation's 9-1-1 systems are rooted in last-century, voice-centric technology. As a result, someone ordering pizza via a mobile app can share more information with Domino's than with 9-1-1.

Much has changed since 1968, when the first 9-1-1 system was introduced.

Originally, 9-1-1 was simply a landline call from a fixed-location phone with a registered address that was answered by an operator who dispatched help. Today, that is no longer the case.

We live in a data-driven world.

NENA estimates that 80% (most likely nearly 90%) of all 9-1-1 calls now come from wireless devices—sometimes while in a moving vehicle. Furthermore, the smartphones used to make these calls can push and pull immense data, including life-saving information such as medical information, location, details of automobile accidents, videos enabling setting context, text messages, and more.

Legacy 9-1-1 systems were not designed to receive photos, location data, texts, or other important information relevant to the emergency.

The answer to this dilemma is the suite of technologies provided by the move to the NG 9-1-1 system. Information-rich 9-1-1 calls will help in responding to emergencies.

In a nutshell, NG9-1-1 is a suite of technologies based on commonly accepted standards that will *fully* modernize 9-1-1 systems—bringing 9-1-1 into the 21st-century digital age. NG9-1-1 also includes enhanced cybersecurity protection, redundancy, increased resiliency during natural or man-made disasters, and the ability for 9-1-1 centers to transfer calls along with accompanying data between centers. With technological advances, an entire ecosystem of commercial vendors now exists, and they are continually creating new ways to improve emergency communications.

Today, NG9-1-1 technology is available, but NG9-1-1 *only works* if 9-1-1 centers across the nation can acquire the necessary technologies. Here lies the issue — the cost of deploying NG9-1-1 systems while maintaining costly legacy systems. This transition cost adds financial strain to communities, states, tribal lands, and territories, and unfortunately, not all can afford the transition. Without government funding, we risk creating a nation of haves and have-nots. The sooner the transition to NG9-1-1 occurs, the sooner legacy systems can be phased out. NextGen 9-1-1 thrives in a robust, interoperable commercial ecosystem that uses widely accepted standards, allowing each 9-1-1 center to select the vendor that best meets its community's needs.

We saw an important component of NG9-1-1 in action in North Carolina during Hurricane Helene last year. Many of North Carolina's 9-1-1 centers have transitioned to an

Emergency Services IP Networks, or ESINet, which allows them to geo-fence affected areas and allows other 9-1-1 centers to handle all emergency calls within those areas. This eases the stress on field responders and impacted communities. While an ESInet is an important part of NextGen 9-1-1—and North Carolina has made significant investments in its systems — as impressive as it is even when fully implemented – ESInets alone are not enough for NG9-1-1. More importantly, until the *entire* country fully deploys NG 9-1-1, no center or state, regardless of their investment, will be able to fully realize the system's benefits.

In 2012, Congress authorized a study to determine the cost of fully deploying NG 9-1-1. This study, which took *six years* to complete, estimated that $8 to $12 billion was needed for NG 9-1-1 deployment. Adjusted for inflation, that amounts to roughly $15 billion, though this figure has probably changed due to state and local investments. Previous bipartisan bills proposed using FCC spectrum auction revenues to fund this effort, but that option is no longer available.

I want to thank Chairman Hudson, Vice Chair Allen, Ranking Member Pallone, and Matsui for their bipartisan support during the markup of the reconciliation bill and previous statements. I hope Congress recognizes this as the emergency it is and establishes a consistent funding stream that can be accessed easily and efficiently by states and local governments for deployment.

I would also note that concern about NG9-1-1 deployment is not limited to members of Congress. In January 2024, 9 former FCC Chairs from both Republican and Democratic administrations sent a letter to Congress underscoring the need to fully fund NG 9-1-1 deployment. Never in the history of the FCC has 9 former FCC chairs signed a letter of support for any issue. This letter underscores the significance of this request.

Unfortunately, everyone in this room will at some point—often during their worst moments—call 9-1-1 to seek help for themselves, a loved one, their community, or as a good Samaritan. When you make that call, you want to ensure you get the *best* response possible, are able to transmit vital information, including photos and videos, and receive the life-saving support you need.

Any further delay compromises our communities' public safety. Waiting for another cost analysis to be completed is not the answer, and it is, in fact, a delay. The answer is for Congress to recognize the importance of funding NG 9-1-1 now. It is imperative that Congress be creative with a funding source for our emergency systems, which are the backbone of our community's public safety.

The time to fund the NG9-1-1 systems is now; failing to do so will limit the public's ability to have information-rich 9-1-1 services that better enable appropriate field responses. Furthermore, as the nation increasingly adopts an IP telecommunications infrastructure, outdated legacy systems will continue to become more expensive to maintain. 9-1-1 Centers cannot turn off these systems until every center has fully deployed NG9-1-1. And these costs are becoming increasingly burdensome.

Thank you for your focus on these critical issues and your commitment to Public Safety Communications.

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