

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology Ranking Member Doris Matsui
Hearing on “Legislative Solutions to Public Safety Communications in the United States”
December 16, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Hudson.

I’m glad we’re having this hearing today, to consider bipartisan solutions to strengthen our public safety communications. Emergencies can happen anywhere, at any time...and in those moments, every second counts. When a parent is trying to get help for their child, when an older adult has fallen, or when a wildfire is moving fast, Americans should never have to wonder whether 9-1-1 will connect.

In the tragic Camp Fire in Northern California near my district in 2018 — the deadliest wildfire in our state’s history — our emergency communications systems faced significant challenges. More than half of initial calls to 9-1-1 never got through, and emergency alert system warnings weren’t consistently sent out.

Since the Camp Fire, communities in my district like Elk Grove have made real progress modernizing emergency communications, moving to cloud-based systems that connect 9-1-1 dispatch with real-time information. Elk Grove is leading the nation by integrating drone-first-response operations into its real-time information center to strengthen situational awareness, community trust, and officer safety.

But local leadership can only go so far without strong federal follow-through—and it’s frustrating that earlier this year House Republicans walked away from bipartisan bills to fund Next Generation 9-1-1 through spectrum auction proceeds, instead steering those dollars to corporate tax breaks and leaving first responders in limbo.

Our communities shouldn’t have to face that uncertainty in a crisis, and our first responders shouldn’t be left without the information they need to fight the fire and save lives. We know that we still have work to do to improve our emergency communication systems.

That’s why I’m proud to work with my colleague, Congressman Bilirakis, on two bipartisan bills to improve the accessibility and reliability of these networks: the Emergency Reporting Act and Kari’s Law Reporting Act. These bills make straightforward improvements to our existing emergency systems—ensuring the protections we’ve already put in place are actually working.

The Emergency Reporting Act is about learning from failures quickly, transparently, and with accountability, so the next disaster doesn’t become a repeat of the last. If people can’t reach

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9-1-1 during a major event, we should know why, and we should have a clear plan to fix it before the next crisis hits.

The Kari's Law Reporting Act makes sure the basic protections Congress already enacted are working in the real world, by checking whether companies are actually complying with the original law.

Kari's Law was born out of a heartbreaking tragedy, when a child tried again and again to call 9-1-1 and couldn't because the system required dialing "9" before any call. That should never happen in America. Our job is to make sure "call 9-1-1" means exactly that—no extra steps, no confusion, no barriers.

Today, I'm looking forward to hearing from our witnesses about what's working, where the gaps remain, and what Congress should do next to strengthen resiliency, improve coordination, and make sure 9-1-1 is easily reachable when it matters most.

With that, I yield back the balance of my time.