

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
TACTICAL AIR AND LAND FORCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS
COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

60

212 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3601

360 SOUTH HOPE AVENUE, C-301
SANTA BARBARA, CA 93105
(805) 730-1710

1411 MARSH STREET, SUITE 205
SAN JOSE, CA 95131
(408) 546-8348

Received & Inspected

JAN 22 2018

FCC Mailroom

January 16, 2018

Chairman Ajit Pai
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street S.W.,
Washington, D.C. 20554

Administrator William B. "Brock" Long
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C St S.W.,
Washington, D.C. 20024

Subject: Federal Wireless Emergency Alert System

Dear Chairman Pai and Administrator Long:

I am writing today to inform you of serious inefficiencies and problems with the Federal Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) System, which were prominent during the recent devastating Thomas Fire and impacted many of my constituents on the Central Coast of California. I ask that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) work with the appropriate stakeholders to address these communication issues that have the potential to prevent the loss of life during emergencies. It would be beneficial for my constituents and Americans across the nation for the FCC to reconsider its delay of the 2016 rule that would strengthen WEA by improving geographic targeting capabilities, increasing the maximum character length, and including the availability of multilingual and multimedia WEA messages.

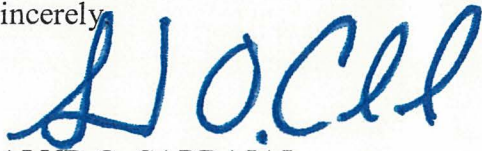
The WEA is a public alert and warning system that uses existing communications assets of the Emergency Alert System participants for federal, state and local authorities to disseminate important emergency information, like extreme weather alerts, to the American public. Additionally, Executive Order 13407 issued by President George W. Bush in 2006 established that "it is the policy of the United States to have an effective, reliable, integrated, flexible and comprehensive system to alert and warn the American people in situations of war, terrorists attack, natural disaster, or other hazards to public safety and well-being..." However, the current WEA system has serious restrictions that limit its ability to reach the intended audiences properly.

WEA's inability to target messages to specific geographic areas means that certain counties cannot effectively use WEA without creating a widespread panic and unnecessary mass evacuations; thus, producing another public hazard. For instance, a WEA message meant to only alert certain Santa Barbara residents was sent out on Sunday, December 10, 2017 at 2:19 a.m. to the entire County and prompted a misunderstanding as to where the impacted areas that needed to evacuate due to the Thomas fire were actually located. Additionally, WEA has a current limit of no more than 90 characters, which forces agencies to abbreviate alerts and results in an unclear and often confusing message.

Furthermore, including multimedia and multilingual WEA messages during disasters is another tool that would allow alerting agencies to send targeted evacuation maps or videos in multiple languages directly to mobile users. This has the potential to provide additional clarity to the public and ensure the well-being of everyone. Instead, through the current process, agencies must rely on social media to share these resources.

As we continue to experience prolonged and disastrous wildfire seasons in the Western United States, it is imperative that we are sufficiently prepared and we address outstanding issues with the WEA system. Again, I ask that the FCC reconsider its delay of the 2016 proposed changes to WEA and for the FCC and FEMA to work with appropriate stakeholders to ensure we are adequately equipped to communicate emergency alerts to the public during the next natural disaster.

Sincerely,



SALUD O. CARBAJAL
Member of Congress



FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

April 13, 2018

The Honorable Salud Carbajal
U.S. House of Representatives
212 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Carbajal:

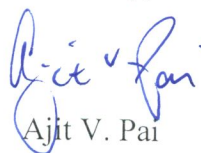
Thank you for your letter regarding the Commission's efforts to enhance the efficacy of the Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system. WEA messages are one of several key tools to warn the public of imminent danger when disaster strikes. As you know, WEA messages were used four times in response to wildfires in Northern California, and 16 times during the wildfires around Los Angeles.

Since 2008, consistent with the Warning, Alert, and Response Network (WARN) Act, the Federal Communications Commission has been working to improve the WEA system and increase the precision of geo-targeted alerts. Nonetheless, we've heard from many jurisdictions that are hesitant to use WEA because it lacks granularity—that is, people may receive the alert even though they're located well outside of an intended target area. That's why the Commission in January adopted new rules to require participating wireless providers to deliver alerts to match 100% of the target area that overlaps with the wireless provider's network coverage area, with an overshoot of no more than one-tenth of a mile. And we require them to do so by November 2019—a timetable that all stakeholders agree is aggressive, but one that the evidence before us showed was achievable.

This rule, coupled with the other improvements we have adopted for WEA—enabling consumers to retrieve alerts for 24 hours after they are received, clarifying the difference between providers participating in WEA “in part” versus “in whole,” affirming the deadline for implementing longer, 360-character length messages, and allowing WEAs to include embedded URLs—will strengthen the WEA system and keep Americans safer. I should note as well that support for Spanish-language alerts is on its way, and the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau recently sought to refresh the record on the inclusion of multimedia in WEA messages.

We share a goal of giving our public safety officials have the best tools available to carry out their mission. Thank you for your interest, and let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Ajit V. Pai