

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**

829

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927  
Minority (202) 225-3641

October 6, 2017

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

Dear Chairman Pai:

In the wake of hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, I write to urge you to conduct a Commission-level review of the resiliency of our nation's networks and the effect of the Wireless Network Resiliency Cooperative Framework following restoration efforts. Keeping our communications networks operational is critical. During natural disasters, people depend on our networks to call for help, monitor the status of loved ones, and coordinate restoration efforts afterward. And while much has been done to strengthen the resiliency of these networks, more is clearly needed. Even one dropped call in an emergency is too many.

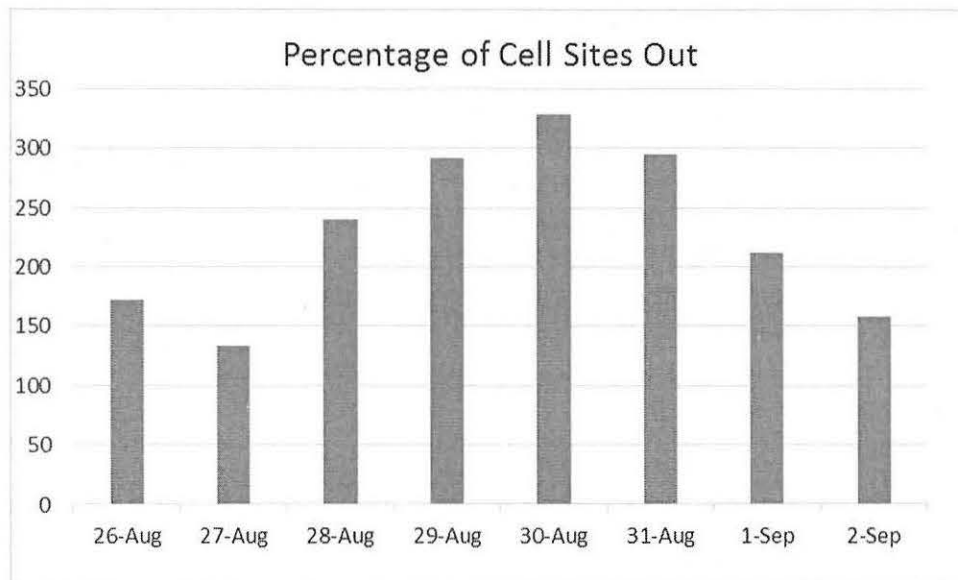
One such recent effort to strengthen our networks is the Wireless Network Resiliency Cooperative Framework, which was the result of an agreement I struck with the wireless industry last year. As part of the Framework, wireless industry leaders committed to me to develop a central plan to improve disaster preparedness and response.<sup>1</sup> The Framework also includes requirements for making roaming and mutual aid arrangements available during a disaster so that consumers can be connected even when their own provider is down. Among other things, the Framework also allows the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to publish wireless network outage data during disasters to give the public and officials a snapshot of the problematic areas.

Given the recent active hurricane season, the FCC has an obligation to review the state of our communications systems, the resilience of our 911 systems, and whether the Framework lives up to its potential. As part of this general review, the FCC should make use of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Joan Marsh, AT&T Services, Inc.; Scott Bergmann, CTIA; Charles McKee, Sprint; Steve Sharkey, T-Mobile; Grant Spellmeyer, US Cellular; William H. Johnson, Verizon to Marlene H. Dortch, Secretary, Federal Communications Commission, (Apr. 27, 2016) ([www.ctia.org/docs/default-source/fcc-filings/160427-final-network-resiliency-commitment-letter.pdf](http://www.ctia.org/docs/default-source/fcc-filings/160427-final-network-resiliency-commitment-letter.pdf)).

Framework's data to isolate the root causes of network outages. Policymakers need a better appreciation of which methods have worked and which have not to ensure we improve our future restoration efforts. Such an analysis would pay dividends. For example, after reviewing the Hurricane Harvey data made available by the Framework, it appears mobile network outages spiked on the third day following the storm.



These data are consistent with what I heard from wireless carriers, broadcasters, and cable operators during and after Hurricane Sandy tore through the northeast—that rebound outages result when network operators do not receive priority access to disaster zones to refuel the networks' backup generators. While I hope that Congress will pass my bill—the Securing Access to Networks in Disasters Act (the SANDy Act) soon, the Commission cannot rest in its efforts improve our communications systems.

A Commission-level evaluation will also help inform Congress and public safety officials about other places where we need to improve. For instance, following Hurricane Irma's landfall in Florida, Senators Nelson and Rubio used data from the Framework to identify where communications systems were down, allowing them to request that the Federal Emergency Management Agency prioritize efforts in those areas.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, I have been told that public safety officials have used the data provided by the Framework to help them assess the situation in their jurisdictions during disasters. On the other hand, I have also heard that some officials are unaware of these data. The FCC should therefore assess whether the Commission is doing

---

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Senators Bill Nelson and Marco Rubio to William B. Long, Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency (Sept. 12, 2017) ([www.rubio.senate.gov/public/\\_cache/files/1bbdee62-c638-4b46-ac65-511b863c3236/E3CBA04DA03B8D1556234836DF6CD009.09.12.17-bn-mr-letter-to-fema-re-cell-service-assistance.pdf](http://www.rubio.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/1bbdee62-c638-4b46-ac65-511b863c3236/E3CBA04DA03B8D1556234836DF6CD009.09.12.17-bn-mr-letter-to-fema-re-cell-service-assistance.pdf)).

enough to make sure local officials are aware and taking advantage of the data made public under the Framework.

The Commission should also include an analysis of the effect of these disasters on 911 infrastructure. According to reports, numerous 9-1-1 call centers—or public safety answering points (PSAPs)—suffered outages in the wake of hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. The Commission must work to better understand what caused these outages and to ensure that call centers, carriers, their vendors, and the relevant 9-1-1 service providers are doing all they can to keep 9-1-1 functioning during a disaster.

Finally, my constituents better understood the effects of Hurricane Sandy on communications network in New Jersey when the full Commission held a field hearing near the site of the disaster after the storm. This hearing provided critical information about how to improve our systems and make them more resilient going forward. After restoration efforts have concluded, I urge you to consider using the field hearing in New Jersey as a model for how you can help the public better understand the outages caused by hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria.

For those reasons, I urge the Commission to begin an evaluation of the resiliency of our nation's networks, in light of recent efforts, to understand what more can be done. As part of this review, I urge the Commission to:

- (1) Review how it can ensure the Wireless Network Resiliency Cooperative Framework is as effective as possible, including better informing public safety officials about the Framework;
- (2) Evaluate all of the data available to the Commission to better understand the root cause of wireless and wireline outages;
- (3) Evaluate all of the data available to the Commission to better understand the root causes of outages among PSAPs and relevant public safety service providers;
- (4) Review the effects recent disasters have had on our communications networks to identify what worked, what did not, and where we can improve;
- (5) Conduct field hearings to uncover what led to the outages caused by recent hurricanes and how the Commission can respond; and
- (6) Evaluate the potential options available to the Commission to address issues raised during its review.

The Honorable Ajit V. Pai  
October 6, 2017  
Page 4

Your assistance in this matter is greatly appreciated, and I look forward to receiving a response by October 27, 2017. If you have any questions, please contact the Democratic Committee staff at (202) 225-3641.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frank Pallone, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Ranking Member

Cc: The Honorable Mignon Clyburn, Commissioner  
The Honorable Michael O'Rielly, Commissioner  
The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel, Commissioner  
The Honorable Brendan Carr, Commissioner





FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON

OFFICE OF  
THE CHAIRMAN

October 24, 2017

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Pallone:

Thank you for your letter regarding the impact to communications from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria. Communications services are vital to reaching help, supporting emergency response activities, and disseminating urgent information during hurricanes. The Commission takes its role promoting communications resilience extremely seriously. I agree that it is important to examine major disruptions after restoration efforts have concluded to apply that knowledge to future emergencies.

The Commission's immediate focus is on assisting with the restoration of communications services and networks in areas that have been devastated by this season's hurricanes. Commission staff have been working around the clock and over weekends on our response, and I am immensely proud of their efforts. For example, to date, the Commission has issued over 200 STAs and waivers to assist communications providers in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. And we have made available up to \$77 million in advanced universal service funding to providers in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands that can be used to rebuild networks and restore service.

We are also assisting ongoing response efforts in support of the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, in accordance with the National Response and Recovery Frameworks. In the face of the unprecedented destruction wrought by Hurricane Maria, we are continuing to collect outage information through our Disaster Information Reporting System, analyze the information collected, and issue daily reports to both Federal government partners and the general public, in keeping with the Wireless Network Resiliency Cooperative Framework. In addition, Commission personnel are currently deployed in Puerto Rico in support of FEMA response and recovery efforts. I have visited communities affected by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma to speak with public safety officials and assess the damage, and I plan a similar visit related to Hurricane Maria in the near future. I have also spoken directly with senior executives at affected communications companies to stay apprised and offer the Commission's support.

Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands were still recovering from Hurricane Irma when Hurricane Maria struck. The severity of the storms and the massive damage to infrastructure on the islands, including the near-total loss of commercial power, exacerbated widespread

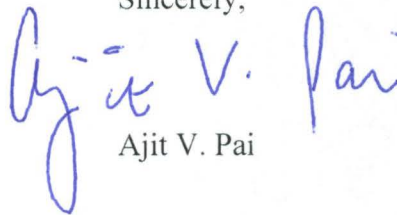
communications outages. Communications providers have faced challenges restoring service. Normal emergency response efforts, including damage assessment and near-term restoration, were severely hindered by the extensive storm debris blocking roads as well as the inability to expeditiously transport much-needed personnel and equipment into an island environment.

As restoration efforts from the hurricanes progress, the Commission is also planning for the transition to long-term recovery. We have established an internal Hurricane Recovery Task Force and are coordinating our planning efforts through the National Disaster Recovery Framework. At the same time, we are mindful that we are still in the midst of Atlantic hurricane season and looking at a persistent wildfire threat in the West.

Although it is premature to determine all our after-action steps at this time, the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau has already announced plans to issue a Public Notice seeking input from a broad range of stakeholders – including state and local officials, the 911 community, Federal response partners, industry, consumer groups, and the public – on what worked during the hurricanes in terms of communications continuity and restoration as well as areas for improvement. The Bureau plans to host a workshop to better understand the issues identified through this public process and develop options to address shortfalls and opportunities. As the ongoing response and recovery efforts continue, the Commission will consider what additional steps, including field hearings, might be taken to ensure communications networks are fully prepared for future disasters.

I appreciate your interest in this matter. Your views are very important as we move forward. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ajit V. Pai". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ajit" being the most prominent part.

Ajit V. Pai