I am assigned to the SC State Fire Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) team as Communications Manager and was forward deployed to Marion, SC following Hurricane Florence’s landfall.  My job was to provide communications to specialized rescue teams providing life saving efforts to those affected by Hurricane Florence. On Monday morning just after Florence made landfall, we were using cellular data when the two cellular providers we were using went off line with both voice and data.  Flood waters were still rising with forecasts of, “historic” flooding in the days to come.  Our teams were active along with local responders making active evacuations and rescues so we were constantly needing to make requests for additional equipment for both the current needs as well as the projected needs. When we lost data, we were unable to make those requests as satellite assets were being used elsewhere. I was able to send a message via Winlink using my assigned SHARES account to personnel back in Columbia notifying them of the outage and requesting additional data support for the event.  It is important to note that I am a General Class Licensed amateur operator and am experienced in both normal amateur Winlink use as well as SHARES use. This started the process of getting voice and data services restored not only to us, but to the survivors and community within the disaster area. Data service returned within an hour, but Winlink did its job and provided real-time emergency communications for us. Once traditional data services returned, we resumed use of the cellular networks. The HF band conditions were horrible during Hurricane Florence making voice communication next to impossible. In fact, I was never able to make as much as a successful test call on either 40 or 80 meters during the deployment using voice/phone between Marion and Columbia, SC. Without Winlink, the outage could have been significantly longer as decision makers would not have known about our needs.

As a result, we support the ARSFI comments to remove the 300 baud restriction in favor of the bandwidth limitation. We respectfully ask the FCC to rule in favor of removing the 300 baud limitation in favor of the 2.8 khz bandwidth limitation. Emergency Communications is one of the four fundamental purposes of amateur radio and this example, along with countless others, provide clear evidence of the need to remove the 300 baud limitation.