

**Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of:

Review of the Emergency Alert System

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EB Docket No. 04-296

**COMMENTS OF THE AMERICAN TELESERVICES ASSOCIATION
REGARDING
THE RESPONSIVE EMERGENCY ALERT AND DISSEMINATION OF
INFORMATION CALL SYSTEM**

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On behalf of the American Teleservices Association (“ATA”), we respectfully submit these comments in response to the Commission’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking regarding the Emergency Alert System (“EAS”), and whether EAS, in its present form, is the most effective mechanism for warning the American public of an emergency and how EAS can be improved.¹

I. STATEMENT OF INTEREST

The ATA is a national trade organization with an industry-wide membership that collectively produces over \$500 billion in annual sales. Its member organizations represent all facets of the teleservices industry and provide traditional and innovative services to Fortune 500 companies. ATA submits this comment in response to the Commission’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on its members’ behalf.

¹ *Review of the Emergency Alert System*, 69 Fed. Reg. 52843 (to be codified at 47 C.F.R. pt. 11) (August 30, 2004).

II. THE EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM

The EAS currently provides the federal government with the capability to disseminate communications and information to the general public during periods of national emergency.² EAS also provides state and local governments with a similar ability during local emergencies which pose a threat to life and property.³ EAS, in its present form, has not been revised since it was first adopted by the Commission in 1994 to replace the Emergency Broadcasting System implemented by President Kennedy.⁴ In the current age of rapid technological and communications advances, ATA concurs with the Commission that it is now appropriate to reevaluate EAS' efficiency, methodology and technological platform.⁵

EAS relies almost exclusively on analog radio and television broadcast stations and cable systems to deliver information and communications; its current capabilities do not employ the full range of communication methods made possible by modern technological advances.⁶ ATA strongly recommends that the Commission expand EAS beyond its reliance on antiquated technology by utilizing existing telephony infrastructure to disseminate emergency messages.

ATA suggests that a new and modernized EAS utilize the teleservices industry's call centers to disseminate such communications. EAS' reliance on, and partnership with, this industry will result in a comprehensive national public warning system capable of reaching virtually every individual and household in the United States, either over wirelines or wireless networks, by capitalizing on infrastructure, technology, resources and capital already in

² 69 Fed. Reg. at 52843.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, *In the Matter of Review of the Emergency Alert System*, proposed August 12, 2004, available at http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-04-189A1.doc

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

existence. ATA suggests that the teleservices industry is best-equipped to partner with the federal government, as its call centers already routinely and systematically contact millions of individuals on a daily basis in the course of their business.

The Commission should note that studies conducted by two public/private partnerships – the Media Security and Reliability Council (“MSRC”) and the Partnership for Public Warning (“PPW”) – both concluded that “effective delivery of emergency information to the public be achieved through a public/private partnership that makes coordinated use of mass media and other dissemination systems.”⁷ Like the MSRC and PPW, ATA also recognizes the need for public/private partnerships to respond to emergencies, particularly considering terrorist threats to homeland security confronted by a “post 9/11” world.

In fact, recognizing the strategic advantage the teleservices industry could provide, ATA and Congress are already working together to implement legislation that creates a public/private partnership which will leverage the industry’s existing infrastructure to notify individuals of emergencies.

In close consultation with ATA, Congressman Kendrick Meek of Florida recently introduced H.R. 2250, which directs the Secretary of Homeland Security to develop and implement an emergency telephonic alert notification system, known as the Responsive Emergency Alert and Dissemination of Information Call System (“READICall”); the Bill was referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.⁸

The Bill directs the Secretary of Homeland Security to utilize the teleservices industry to:

- (1) alert citizens of imminent or current hazardous events caused by terrorist acts and other man-

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *READICall Emergency Alert System*, H.R. 2250, 108th Cong. (2003).

made disasters; and (2) provide information to individuals regarding measures that may be undertaken to alleviate or minimize threats to their safety and welfare.⁹

The Bill also directs the Secretary to

(1) [M]ake use of national private sector networks, technology, personnel and infrastructure to develop and implement [READICall]; and (2) develop coordinated infrastructure for [READICall], in collaboration with the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information [and] the national teleservices industry. . . that (A) uses the full range of available telecommunications technology; and (B) will be able to provide immediate notification and warning to all telephone subscribers in the United States in a national crisis resulting from a terrorist act[.]”¹⁰

It is ATA’s hope that implementation of READICall will provide for a collaborative effort that will “allow for the immediate dissemination of information both laterally and horizontally, such that information can be provided from all levels of governmental sources[.]”¹¹

IV. Conclusion

ATA strongly encourages the FCC to adopt and incorporate the READICall Emergency Alert System into the EAS. ATA suggests that implementation of the READICall system will accomplish the Commission’s goal of improving the technology and distribution channels on which EAS relies and will permit it do so in an efficient manner by relying on the teleservices industry’s existing technology, infrastructure and capital.

⁹ See H.R. 2250.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

Respectfully submitted,

AMERICAN TELESERVICES ASSOCIATION

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