

December 16, 2013

Hon. Tom Wheeler, Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St. S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

RE: Review of the Emergency Alert System (EB Docket No. 04-296); Recommendations of the Independent Panel Reviewing the Impact of Hurricane Katrina on Communications Networks (EB Docket 06-119)

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

Weather or other emergencies can strike at any time, with or without warning. Regardless of a person's language, everyone deserves to receive information on how to survive a natural or manmade disaster, and stay safe.

Presently the FCC has no plan to achieve this goal. In many cities with large Spanish speaking populations, there are no stations broadcasting in Spanish. During Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the only Spanish language station was damaged and could not return to the air for eight critical days. During those eight days, over 100,000 Latinos had no landline service, no cellular telephony, no television, no radio, and no print media in their language. During this time of desperate need, finding medical facilities, shelter, food, and potable water was a matter of life and death for tens of thousands who were not fluent in English.

Immediately after Katrina, the Independent Spanish Broadcasters Association, the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, Inc. and the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council filed the "Katrina Petition" with the FCC. The Petition urgently requested FCC action to ensure that a multilingual communications blackout, such as the one that occurred during and after Katrina, could never happen again. The following year, a distinguished FCC advisory committee - the Independent Panel Reviewing the Impact of Hurricane Katrina on Communications - recommended that "the FCC should... [p]romptly find a mechanism to resolve any technical and financial hurdles in the current EAS to ensure that non-English speaking people or persons with disabilities have access to public warnings, if readily achievable...."

Yet over eight years and six rounds of pleadings later, the FCC still has taken no steps to ensure that multilingual emergency communications will be available during and after major emergencies.

As leading organizations that have long advocated for the full inclusion of Latinos in the communications industries, we respectfully request the Commission to act immediately on the long-pending Katrina Petition.

Sincerely,

Latinos in Information, Sciences and Technology Association (LISTA)
Latinos in Social Media (LATISM)
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
MANA, A National Latina Organization (MANA)
Minority Media and Telecommunications Council (MMTC)
National Association of Latino Independent Producers
National Conference of Puerto Rican Women, Inc.
National Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce
Rainbow PUSH Coalition
Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press

[The contact for this letter is David Honig, President, MMTC; dhonig@crosslink.net and 202-669-4533.]