

**REMARKS OF COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI
AT THE 9-1-1 GOES TO WASHINGTON CONFERENCE**

ARLINGTON, VA

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I am honored to be with you this afternoon at 9-1-1 Goes to Washington. I appreciate the title of this event because it reminds us that the real action involving emergency response isn't taking place in Washington, DC. It's happening out in the field. From the neighborhoods of New York City to the cornfields of Kansas, members of the National Emergency Number Association are on the front lines each and every day, working to ensure that Americans receive the assistance they need when they dial 911. I salute all of you for your service to our country.

Our role at the FCC, as I see it, is to support your heroic efforts. It's not just a calling; it's a duty.

In fact, the very first section of the Communications Act tasks the FCC with "promoting safety of life and property through the use of wire and radio communications," and our nation's 911 systems are critical to achieving that objective.

That is why, in my very first speech as an FCC Commissioner, I said that "when consumers dial 911, they need to reach emergency personnel." It shouldn't matter whether you are using the traditional public switched telephone network, a VoIP application, or a wireless phone. Nor should it matter if you are using a phone in a hotel—like this one—or another large building.

The bottom line is this: When consumers dial 911, they expect and deserve to reach first responders who can assist them during their time of need.

We in the United States often take our 911 system for granted. But my recent trip to India reminded me how fortunate we are. In India, there isn't a single number that people can call for help. There's one number to reach the police, another for the fire department, and yet another if you need an ambulance. There are even different numbers for senior citizens, women, and children to use. I learned that many Indian households have a long list of numbers stuck on their walls and refrigerator doors to remind them which number to call for which emergency. All of this leads to needless confusion and delayed response times. The lesson I take from all of this? We are fortunate to have a commonly understood system when it comes to emergency calls, a system based on the famous design principle developed by the U.S. Navy in the 1960s: Keep it simple, stupid.

In most respects, we in the United States have abided by this principle. But as we have learned all too well during these past few months, there is at least one area where we have fallen short. Some multi-line telephone systems (or MLTS), which are in use in many large buildings, fail in the most basic task of connecting a 911 caller to someone who can help.

For example, this past December, Kari Rene Hunt Dunn met her estranged husband in a Marshall, Texas hotel room so that he could visit their three children, ages nine, four, and three. During that encounter, Kari's husband forced her into the bathroom and began stabbing her. Kari's nine-year-old daughter did exactly what every child is taught to do during an emergency. She picked up the phone and dialed 911. The call didn't go through, so she tried again. And again. And again. All in all, she dialed 911 *four times*. But she never reached emergency personnel. Why? Because the hotel's phone system required her to press 9 before dialing 911. Tragically, Kari died as a result of this vicious attack.

Kari's daughter behaved heroically under horrific circumstances. But the hotel's phone system failed her, her mother, and her entire family.

Like many of you, I was shocked to hear this story. And I made a personal commitment to Kari's father, Hank Hunt, to do something about it. So earlier this year, I started an inquiry to determine how we

can ensure that whenever someone dials 911 from a hotel, motel, or office building, he or she can reach emergency personnel. Now that about two months have passed, I thought that it was a good time to provide an update on where things stand. And I could think of no better place to do so than at this event.

As with many things in life, there is good news and there is bad news. Let's start with the bad. The data we've gathered suggests that the MLTS at tens of thousands of buildings across the United States may fail consumers during the most important moments of their lives. As in Kari's case, systems at these properties will not perform one of the most important purposes of the nation's communications network—connecting 911 callers to help.

How do we know this? As a first step in my inquiry, I sent letters in January to the CEOs of the ten largest hotel chains in the U.S., asking them basic questions about the status of 911 dialing at their properties. I wanted to get hard data about the number and percentage of lodging properties where guests would be unable to reach help when they dial 911. I also asked the companies to detail their plans for fixing such situations. And if they didn't have plans, I asked them why not.

All ten companies, along with the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AH&LA), responded to my inquiry. My office also has held a number of meetings and other discussions with both AH&LA and its member companies. AH&LA has been particularly helpful, and I thank them for their efforts. In fact, the association is conducting an ongoing survey of both franchised and independent lodging properties in the U.S., asking questions similar to the ones I posed to the ten largest hotel companies.

Here's what we've learned so far. To begin with, only a small percentage of the roughly 53,000 lodging properties in the U.S. are owned or directly managed by large chains. The vast majority of hotels and motels—including those that operate under a large company's brand name—are actually managed by independent owners or franchisees. And unfortunately, the state of 911 calling at these properties is troubling.

For example, accordingly to AH&LA's survey, in only 44.5% of franchised properties will a guest dialing 911 reach emergency services. And the figure for independent hotels and motels is even worse. In only 32% of those properties will a guest reach emergency services by dialing 911.

These statistics are alarming. They show that the telephone systems at tens of thousands of lodging properties across this country could fail Americans when it counts. My message to the hospitality industry has been straightforward: This is not acceptable. The technology to prevent these failures already exists, and now is the time to use it.

But there's also good news to report. *First*, many hotel chains have reported to me that at all or nearly all of the properties they own or directly manage, guests will reach emergency services when they dial 911. For example, La Quinta reports that 100% of the telephone systems at its managed properties allow guests to connect directly with emergency services when they dial 911. Starwood reports that guests can directly dial 911 and reach a PSAP or 911 call center at over 91% of the properties it manages. And InterContinental, Wyndham, Hyatt, and Marriott all report similar figures for their managed properties.

Second, and more important, we are making progress in fixing this problem. Our nation's hospitality industry has stepped up to the plate and is rising to meet this challenge. Just days after I launched this inquiry, AH&LA responded by convening a task force to address 911 calling. The task force is diverse. It represents a cross-section of the industry, including AH&LA members that own and manage lodging properties, as well as those with IT and security expertise. The Association is working to develop best practices, as well. In short, AH&LA has shown me that it is committed to ensuring that whenever someone dials 911 at a U.S. lodging property, he or she is connected with someone who can help.

So we are getting results. In fact, in just a couple of months, the situation on the ground has already started to change. Take La Quinta. After surveying its franchisees earlier this year, the company discovered that in about 60% of its franchised hotels a guest would not reach emergency services by dialing 911. La Quinta understood that this situation was unacceptable and instructed its franchisees to solve the problem. Just ten days ago, the company told me that by April 1, it expects *all* La Quinta-branded hotels will have systems in place that will connect guests with emergency personnel when 911 is called. This means that one company will have fixed this problem in hundreds of hotels in just two-and-a-half months.

But La Quinta is far from alone. Many other hotel chains are taking action. The InterContinental Hotel Group has informed me that the telephone provider for two of their hotel brands has already agreed to push out a no-cost software update to allow for direct 911 dialing. Marriott says that it has begun testing the phone systems at its properties in coordination with local emergency response personnel. Hilton is educating its franchisees and is working with phone system providers to evaluate and recommend appropriate upgrades. And other companies are also making headway. I thank all of these hotel chains for what they are doing and will do going forward.

So where do we go from here? My office will keep working with the hospitality industry on solving this problem. And I'm optimistic that the number of hotels where guests can reach emergency services by dialing 911 will keep growing.

But the time has also come to expand this effort.

For this isn't just an issue for hotels. It also impacts the office buildings where Americans work and the schools where our children learn, among other places. And in order to address the problem on this broader scale, we need the involvement of the MLTS vendor community.

Therefore, I am launching the next step in my inquiry today by sending letters to the leading vendors of MLTS services and products. I am asking them a series of questions, including whether their MLTS products allow consumers to dial 911 without the need for a 9 or any other access code. For products that include this functionality, but are not currently configured to allow direct access to 911, I am asking the companies to identify the steps that would be necessary to modify those devices. I am also asking the companies to identify their plans for ensuring that all consumers who use their MLTS products or services reach someone when they dial 911. If they do not have such plans, my letters ask them to explain why they are not willing to take this step.

I look forward to hearing from the vendor community in the coming weeks. Their leadership on this issue will be vital.

And so will yours. Since this cause began, I've found that the greatest weapon in our arsenal is awareness. Once people learn of this problem, they want to help. So when you go back to your communities, please take up the baton. Ask those who manage your local hotels, office buildings, and schools whether their phone systems allow a caller to reach help by dialing 911 without an access code. If they don't know the answer to this question, help them find out. And if the answer is no, ask them to fix their systems and offer to help them figure out how to do so.

Working together, we can ensure that anyone who dials 911 can reach someone who can help—no matter where they're calling from. To put it simply, I don't want another child in our country to go through what Kari's daughter experienced. I don't want another father to have to suffer what Hank's had to endure—even though he's proven in the time since that one man with courage makes a majority. That's why I'm going to continue to do everything I can to reach this goal. And I look forward to working with many of you to make that happen.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss this important issue and for the work you do in advancing the effectiveness of our nation's 911 systems.