

United States Senate

1021

October 1, 2015

The Honorable Tom Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St. SW
Washington, DC 20554

WCB-
Public Safety
Next
Generation

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

As you know, the ongoing transition from copper wire based telephone networks to fiber based networks is an exciting new frontier that will modernize U.S. communications infrastructure and help communications companies to provide enhanced services to consumers. I fully support this transition; however, several constituents have outlined concerns surrounding the transition in New Jersey and across the country.

I applaud the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) recent efforts to expand protections for consumers during the technology transition and agree it is absolutely critical consumers be informed about what shifts means for their existing telephone service (including its cost). The Commission's new rules requiring service providers to notify customers about these transitions will go a long way to help inform the public and provide the tools necessary for a smooth and affordable transition.

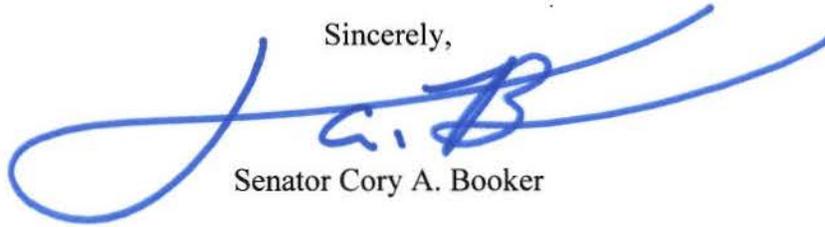
While the increased transparency and oversight are excellent steps towards a successful transition, I remain concerned about emergency preparedness during the transition. Unlike the older copper networks, fiber networks will require the use of emergency backup battery power during an outage. Telephone service providers have already begun outreach and education to consumers about this change, and I appreciate the work the FCC has done on this issue as well. I believe, however, more can be done to ensure individuals are prepared when a storm or disaster strikes. New Jersey has been ravaged by severe weather incidents in the past, which have often included major power outages. While the backup battery power will aid individuals in the event of a storm, they come at a cost to consumers. For low income individuals in communities in my state and across the country, this could mean deciding between paying for everyday essentials and investing in protective measures to preserve their vital communications links in the event of a storm or other natural disaster.

The United States has successfully undergone technology transitions in the past, such as the switch from analog to digital television, known as the DTV transition, which took place nearly a decade ago. During the DTV transition, vouchers were provided to ensure individuals of all economic backgrounds could participate in the new and advanced television services without losing services they had come to rely upon. With this in mind, I request that the FCC examine

the consequences of power outages through the IP transition and make recommendations to Congress on how the public and private sectors can support emergency backup batteries to ensure individuals with new fiber connections have emergency power in the event of a storm or outage. Such connectivity will allow individuals and families to access critical services such as 911 if and when disaster strikes.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter, and I look forward to reviewing the FCC's recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C.A.B.', is written over the word 'Sincerely,'. The signature is stylized and fluid.

Senator Cory A. Booker

CC: Commissioners Clyburn, Rosenworcel, Pai, O'Rielly