

June 27, 2016

The Honorable Thomas Wheeler
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.
Washington DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler,

I write today to discuss the issue of emergency 911 services and the increasing need to ensure that we expand access to these services during critical times of need. In light of recent tragic events, especially the shootings in Orlando and San Bernardino, we must do everything possible to guarantee individuals can access 911 in more safe and innovative ways.

In a rapidly developing technological society, it is important that our essential utilities and infrastructure keep up with current advancements. Although the national 911 system has sustained success for more than 30 years, it is clear that it cannot accommodate technological advances without significant updates. Wireless and IP-based communication devices offer capabilities such as text, video messaging and picture messaging, and have become one of the main ways we communicate, yet the majority of our 911 system is incapable of receiving information from these new modes of communication. In an age where sending a text, photo, or video is commonplace, our 911 system should be well-equipped to meet the demands of the smartphone era.

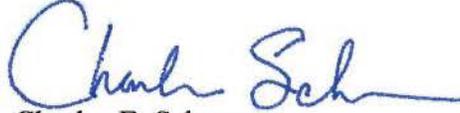
Recent events have demonstrated the need to access 911 dispatchers with more than traditional voice calls. In fact, during the Orlando shooting, many individuals were able to use their cell phones to text loved ones; however they were unable to text 911. The usefulness of an advanced 911 system in states where the technology exists demonstrates the substantial help it is for those with disabilities or in situations where initiating a voice call may be too dangerous. In areas where call centers experience high call volumes, 911 technologies like Next Generation (NG911), which supports voice, text, data, and video communication, can help overburdened emergency centers better handle their response.

I am pleased that the FCC has taken such a strong position on text-to-911, including adopting rules to ensure mobile carriers provide text-to-911 services to the 911 call centers that request them. However while I am pleased with this progress, I am concerned that the nationwide deployment of text-to-911, and more advanced solutions like NG911, is moving far too slowly to efficiently address the emergency response needs of our nation.

While I understand that there are many complex elements to the updating of 911 systems, I believe your Commission has the authority to expedite the process and play a more substantial role in its progress. As such, I urge you to convene all the appropriate stakeholders, including the telecommunications carriers, 911 call centers, and the state and local governments, in order to figure out what barriers exist to NG911 implementation and how we can speed up the process.

It is my hope that the FCC does everything possible to elevate this issue and facilitate a swift transition to a more advanced 911 system. I look forward to hearing from you and to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles E. Schumer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "C" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator