

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN TOM WHEELER

Re: *Facilitating the Deployment of Text-to-911 and Other Next Generation 911 Applications*, PS Docket No. 11-153; *Framework for Next Generation 911 Deployment*, PS Docket No. 10-255

Today, we are taking actions that allow 911 to keep pace with new technology, that sets the stage for enabling even more functionality on the 911 platform, and, most importantly, that will save lives.

Texting has become a widely adopted communications tool and is the principal means by which many people with disabilities communicate. Last year, in fact, Americans sent 1.91 trillion traditional text messages. And beyond that huge number, multiple interconnected text providers have begun competing with the text service provided by CMRS carriers.

This past January, the Commission unanimously adopted a Policy Statement and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking which reflected a very straightforward philosophy: as technologies and consumer behavior continue to change, the FCC needs to make sure 911 changes with them. We proposed that not only should all carriers enable text-to-911, but all interconnected text providers should as well. In other words, if a consumer can use an app to text to a phone number, she should be able to text to the most important phone she may ever use – 911.

What we've learned in the ensuing months has reinforced why that philosophy is so important. For example, we know that text-to-911, where it is available, is a lifesaver. In Hamilton County, Ohio, a young woman was contemplating suicide, and a friend urged her to call for help. She didn't want her parents to hear her on the phone, though, so she texted instead, and received counseling that may have saved her life. In Collier County, Florida, which only recently started supporting text-to-911, a woman was having a medical emergency and called 911 three times, but was unable to speak. She then texted, "Help me," and first responders were finally dispatched. And in Vermont, which supports texting statewide, a woman was injured while hiking alone on a remote trail. Although cell phone coverage was not good enough for her to make a voice call, she was able to text 911 and through that exchange direct first responders to her location.

In light of these facts, the actions we take today make perfect sense. In the Order, we adopt rules that ensure 911 keeps pace with changing technology by requiring that all interconnected text providers have the capability of delivering a text to 911. In the Further Notice, we seek comment on proposals to address how non-interconnected text services should be dealt with. Text messaging has become increasingly utilized by mobile users, and it should be able to serve those consumers in a time of need.

When we adopted the Policy Statement in January, I spoke of the regulatory "see-saw," which holds that if industry acts in the public interest, FCC involvement will be low, but if the public interest is not being served, the Commission will not hesitate to act. On text-to-911, it's time for the Commission to act.

The four nationwide wireless carriers voluntarily committed to support text-to-911 by May 15, 2014, and as promised, they now support text-to-911 throughout their networks. But no other providers have offered voluntary commitments to implement text-to-911. This is disappointing. No company can hang up on 911, so today's Report and Order will require all

wireless providers and interconnected text providers to support text-to-911. For those carriers that voluntarily implemented the service, our rules should not change their course or impose any undue burdens. Importantly, these rules apply to certain over-the-top, interconnected text providers as well as the traditional CMRS carriers.

While the FCC and certain parts of the industry are stepping up to meet their responsibilities, we need more state and local governments to step up and ensure that the 911 fees that consumers pay as part of their monthly phone bills are being directed to ensuring that public safety answering points, or PSAPs, have the resources they need to stay current. Today, text-to-911 is supported by more than 100 PSAPs serving 18 states (including the entire states of Vermont and Maine). Those numbers have improved since January, but significantly more work needs to be done.

The message to providers, the public safety community, and, most importantly, consumers, should be crystal clear: the Commission will not stand idly by and allow public safety to become an afterthought just because technologies change. Americans should not have to worry about whether the platforms and services they use for everyday communications can reach 911 in an emergency.