

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER AJIT PAI**

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.

Late last week, four nationwide carriers—AT&T, Verizon, Sprint Nextel, and T-Mobile—submitted to the Commission a voluntary commitment to enable text-to-911 on their networks by May 15, 2014. Even sooner, by June 30, 2013, these companies will provide an automatic “bounce back” notification should a 911 text not go through. I commend these carriers for their leadership in this critical endeavor and thank my colleagues for their hard work in forging this agreement.

Congress made clear in the Spectrum Act that establishing a Next Generation 911 system should be a national priority. Providing text-to-911 functionality, in turn, is an important step on the journey of making Next Generation 911 a reality.

It is not an exaggeration to say that this issue can be a matter of life and death. Today, over 40 million Americans with hearing or speech disabilities can find it difficult, if not impossible, to use 911 in an emergency. Enabling them to reach first responders with a text message would help solve this problem. Similarly, an emergency text could be lifesaving to those who are unable to place a voice call due to threatening circumstances, such as domestic abuse. Texting also could be a more reliable way of reaching 911 in areas where network coverage is spotty or a network is congested.

I am encouraged that early text-to-911 trials have proven successful and look forward to reviewing the record that will be compiled in response to today’s Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. As we move forward with this proceeding, we should keep a couple of basic principles in mind.

First, we should not hesitate to set aggressive targets for the transition to Next Generation 911, but our goals must also be achievable. It is not in anyone’s interest for us to impose mandates that are impossible to meet. In particular, we must not mislead the public into relying on text-to-911 functionality until it is actually operational, for that could lead to fatal consequences.

Second, we must work together in a cooperative manner with our partners in local governments, who are responsible for the 6,000-plus Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) that handle 911 calls throughout the United States. PSAPs were set up to handle basic voice calls, and they have performed that task very well over many years. But they will need to migrate someday soon to a Next Generation 911 system so that they can process not just voice and text, but photos, video, and other data. As today’s FNPRM explains, this transition will be expensive, and it will take time. And in the current economic climate, it will be hard for PSAPs to obtain the funding necessary to provide even an SMS texting solution to carriers. This is a challenge that requires attention from all levels of government.

In closing, while there is a great deal of work yet to do in order to make text-to-911 a reality for all Americans, I am encouraged by the progress we have already made and look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues in aggressively pursuing this critical objective. I would like to thank all the staff of the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau (PSHSB) involved in this effort, especially David Turetsky, David Furth, Aaron Garza and Patrick Donovan. Your long hours and dedication to this cause have resulted in today’s important achievement.