

Letter From Nine Former FCC Chairs to Congressional Leadership

February 21, 2024

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
House Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives

As former chairs of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), we believe that 9-1-1 is a critical lifeline for citizens who need help. Simply put, if 9-1-1 fails, lives are lost. Unfortunately, America's 9-1-1 system – the backbone of our nation's emergency response infrastructure – desperately needs a technology upgrade. We urge you to take action to update 9-1-1 and promote public safety.

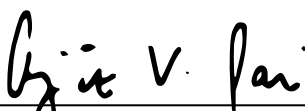
Since the first 9-1-1 call was made in 1968, the FCC has worked with state, local, and tribal government agencies, communications service providers, and technology companies to ensure that our 9-1-1 system is robust, redundant, and reliable. This system has been an enormous success, with countless lives saved and virtually all Americans aware that they should call 9-1-1 in an emergency. But much of our 9-1-1 system is based on legacy technologies like copper landlines and voice-only land mobile radios. Today, the public has moved beyond these technologies toward data-centric and multimedia-intensive communications, stretching our old voice-centric 9-1-1 system to the limits of its capabilities. Legacy 9-1-1 does not reflect the ways that most citizens communicate today. Moreover, it is unable to use and share data, like caller location, that would enable more effective emergency response, better protect first responders, and ultimately save lives.

Fortunately, the technologies needed to upgrade 9-1-1 already exist and can be deployed right now. Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) is a fully digital, Internet protocol-based system that is fast, agile, and flexible enough to meet the needs of callers and emergency responders alike, both today and well into the future. It makes possible dramatic improvements in emergency response, such as better reliability, stronger cybersecurity, better accessibility for the disabled, and enhanced interoperability and data sharing. Transitioning from legacy 9-1-1 to NG9-1-1 would be the public safety equivalent of moving from dial-up Internet access to optical fiber.

However, one-time Federal funding is needed to deploy NG9-1-1 nationwide. States, tribal communities, and local 9-1-1 authorities do not have the estimated \$15 billion needed to fully implement NG9-1-1. In fact, they face a double-bind in this regard as they must spend scarce funds maintaining legacy 9-1-1 systems until NG9-1-1 is fully deployed and operational. In terms of a funding source that would not impact the federal budget, one option is to use federal spectrum auctions revenues, which in recent years have contributed over \$100 billion to the U.S. Treasury. Another might be the repurposing of appropriated but unspent COVID-era funding under the American Rescue Plan Act, Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or similar vehicles. Whatever the funding source, the need is urgent and the time to act is now.

Today, there is a national consensus that every American deserves access to modern communications technologies, such as broadband. We applaud this development and believe that nationwide NG9-1-1

is the public safety linchpin of this renewed commitment to universal service. We urge Congress to help meet this commitment by making nationwide NG9-1-1 deployment a top priority and passing legislation that would assist all levels of government with responsibilities for 9-1-1 infrastructure. As evidenced by the signatories of this letter – both Democratic and Republican former chairs – this is a bipartisan issue that all of America’s leaders should fully support. We urge Congress to act swiftly to protect the safety and security of our citizens, our communities, and our nation, and stand ready to assist you in this effort.



Ajit Pai
FCC Chairman, 2017 – 2021



Tom Wheeler
FCC Chairman, 2013 – 2017



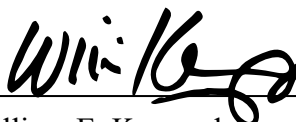
Mignon Clyburn
FCC Chairwoman, 2013



Julius Genachowski
FCC Chairman, 2009 – 2013



Michael J. Copps
FCC Chairman, 2009



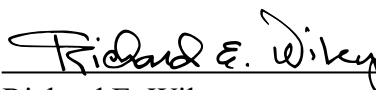
William E. Kennard
FCC Chairman, 1997 – 2001



Reed E. Hundt
FCC Chairman, 1993 – 1997



Dennis R. Patrick
FCC Chairman, 1987 – 1989



Richard E. Wiley
FCC Chairman, 1974 – 1977

CC: Jessica Rosenworcel, FCC Chairwoman
Xavier Becerra, Secretary of Health and Human Services
Pete Buttigieg, Secretary of Transportation
Alejandro Mayorkas, Secretary of Homeland Security
Gina Raimondo, Secretary of Commerce
Alan Davidson, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information & NTIA Administrator