

Statement of Congressman Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)
House of Representatives Committee on Rules
H.R. 152, Disaster Relief Appropriations Act, 2013
January 14, 2013

- Chairman Sessions and Ranking Member Slaughter, thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify before the Committee in support of my amendment – the **“Enhancing 9-1-1 Service Resiliency and Reliability Act of 2013.”**
- My amendment is a **straightforward, cost-effective, and urgently-needed** action to address a lurking critical weakness that threatens to hinder disaster relief efforts across the Nation – the lack of **reliable** and **resilient** 9-1-1 service.
- As you may recall, a powerful, fast-moving windstorm, or “Derecho,” swept across the National Capital Region last summer ... exposing **stunning** critical and systemic vulnerabilities in our region’s 9-1-1 service network, operated by Verizon.
- The numbers alone are staggering – following the Derecho, **3.6 million people in 6 States** were cut off from at least **77 emergency 9-1-1 call centers**, including **1.5 million Verizon customers in Northern Virginia alone**.
- **This status quo is absolutely unacceptable. In an emergency, 9-1-1 service must work, period. Any** deviation from this standard makes a **mockery of the entire concept** of universal emergency communications service.
- This issue is also **highly germane** to the legislation at hand. As a recent New York Times story noted:

“Any doubt remaining after the derecho about the fragility of the nation’s emergency communications system **was wiped out four months later when Hurricane Sandy hit the Northeast, wiping out cellphone towers and flooding residential telephone service centers, leaving millions more without communications links during an emergency.**”
- Worst of all, Verizon’s unacceptable response in the aftermath of the Derecho – which began with **outright denials** ... followed by **cryptic P.R. releases** ... and finally culminated in Verizon’s **very reassuring** acknowledgment last week that it

“understands the critical role it plays in the 911 ecosystem,” and takes its “role seriously,” does **not** breed confidence that the telecommunications industry will fix this problem if left to its own devices.

- I want to commend FCC Chairman Genachowski for recognizing that 9-1-1 service failures are simply unacceptable, and I appreciate the Commission’s commitment to “do whatever is necessary to ensure the reliability of 911.”
- I also want to express my appreciation to the FCC’s Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau for conducting a thorough investigation of this shameful incident, and producing **concrete and constructive recommendations** that simply hold industry to its own **existing** standards and **long-standing** best practices.
- As the FCC’s Final Report notes, “In most cases, the 9-1-1 and other problems could and would have been avoided if providers had followed industry best practices and available guidance.”
- If enacted, my amendment will ensure that the Commission’s hard work and commonsense recommendations are not wasted or forgotten.
- While it is too late for Northern Virginia to be spared the consequences of Verizon’s astonishingly poor operation of our 9-1-1 service network ... my hope is that our experience can serve as the proverbial canary in a coal mine to warn the rest of the Nation, and lead to the full implementation of the FCC’s recommendations to ensure that no other State is forced to experience a major disaster without 9-1-1 service.
- Once again, thank you for allowing me to testify this afternoon.
- I hope all my colleagues will join me in supporting this important amendment, and I **respectfully request that the Chairman provide that any point of order under Rule XXI, clause 2 be waived in light of the urgent public safety threat posed to communities across the country by vulnerable and unreliable 9-1-1 service.**