

## **November 17, 2022: FCC Hearing on Impact to Communications of Hurricanes Fiona and Ian**

Statement from Christina Dayries, Deputy Director, Chief of Staff for the Louisiana Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP)

Good morning,

Thank you for allowing me to represent the State of Louisiana today to brief you on disaster response and restoration coordination for emergency communications.

Louisiana has had a busy couple of years between the 2020 and 2021 hurricane seasons with 13 state emergency declarations, 11 of which were federally declared, and Hurricane Ida being the most recent one, which is where I will focus my comments for today's hearing.

As a result of the multiple disaster events, our perspective in regard to emergency communications may provide critical insight as you prepare for future events.

I would first like to begin by thanking the Chairwoman Rosenworcel, for your willingness to travel to meet with Governor Edwards and our Louisiana team following Hurricane Ida and for your recent visit in September. These visits reflect the partnership and responsiveness required to address the challenges created by the historic storms which impacted our state in 2020 and 2021.

We appreciate the action taking by the Commission to address several of the issues raised during our discussions and the continued dialogue and priority placed on emergency communications. Increasing the awareness of emergency communications and advocating for additional funding to support this critical lifeline are priorities for our state and it is encouraging to know that you understand this. We look forward working with you on this important effort.

During the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Ida, which made landfall on August 29, 2021 our dedicated statewide public safety emergency communication system, known to us as the Louisiana Wireless Information Network, or LWIN for short, was severely impacted along the coastal areas largely due to connectivity outages and loss of power. However, by September 5, 2021, the LWIN system was working at 99% of normal capacity.

Working with our contracted vendors; Motorola for LWIN system equipment, and AT&T for LWIN connectivity, we were able to quickly identify and restore critical first responder communications. This type of partnership was not developed overnight, we have worked diligently with our private sector and public agencies since Hurricane Katrina to not only build relationships, but to also leverage funding from federal, state and local

sources to have redundant solutions available for our first responder communications system.

Based on lessons learned from Hurricane Laura in 2020 and Hurricane Ida in 2021, our state leveraged one time federal funding as well significant state funding to upgrade the connectivity and resiliency of our tower sites to better support our first responders and emergency communication stakeholders.

The LWIN system experienced multiple Site Outages.

To address and mitigate issues like these, we have several communications resources available to us to quickly restore critical radio communications. We deployed four (4) mobile LWIN tower sites, a Mobile Command Post, seven (7) generator on wheels, three (3) satellite flyaways, one (1) satellite trailer kit, LTE/Broadband connectivity to four (4) sites, and one (1) Star link package.

After each disaster event we develop an After Action Report and Improvement Plan or AAR/IP to summarize the strengths and challenges of the communications response, with a focus on communications that were specifically impacted by the damaging events. I would like to recognize and thank the Department of Homeland Security Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, and the Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program for their assistance in preparing our AAR/IP for the Ida disaster.

This Ida event identified newer areas where we saw the need for improvement.

The LWIN system areas of focus include:

- Quicker LWIN restoration, where we identified further coordination with newer and existing vendors,
- a need for more rapid site assessments which will be augmented by the Louisiana National Guard Signal Unit, and
- increase our deployable communication assets.

In addition to our LWIN system that went down for a short time, we experienced major E-911 or Public Safety Answering Point or (PSAP) loss of connectivity. Meaning, the citizens of Louisiana that needed emergency services were unable to call 9-1-1 to request responder assets including some that were unreachable even by the State Emergency Operations Center. To address these and other emergency communication challenges, Louisiana identified further coordination is required among Federal, State and private sector partners for disaster events.

Louisiana recommended the following:

- We requested the FCC and AT&T implement mandatory reporting of Critical Public Safety Circuits or (CPSC) with Telecommunications Service Priority or (TSP) for any area where Disaster Information Reporting System or (DIRS) is

activated. Although the carrier's report to the FCC is not detailed, it does provide broad information, (40% down or 70% restored), which Louisiana would use as a trigger point to request a carriers report with more specific circuit information. This would assist us in identifying remedies for a quicker restoration or backup solution.

- We requested the FCC provide four (4) FCC Personnel (2 from Project Roll Call and 2 for PSAP/local government tracking) deploy to Louisiana. The FCC Project Roll teams look for signals while riding around in 4-wheel drive vehicles and could provide notification to our ESF-2, Communications cell on what communications systems are down. There is currently no mandate, process or procedures in place and Louisiana must work to manually figure out what is down.
- We requested the FCC require the Mandatory Disaster Response Initiative or (MDRI) (roaming during disasters), which would allow seamless communications for our citizenry and first responders. This went into effect on October 31<sup>st</sup> of this year and we are thankful.
- We requested that the FirstNet President provide for more visibility of mobile asset locations and better coordination with the Network Operations Group.
  - We requested that all agencies including the FCC and commercial telecommunications providers operating in Louisiana locate in our Commercial Carrier Group (CCG) where we have a dedicated meeting space to facilitate meetings and coordination during disaster events.
  - We also request one (1) National Coordination Center (NCC) / CISA personnel to coordinate response efforts of wireless and wireline carriers.

To summarize, overall since Hurricane Katrina we have seen significant improvement in our coordination among agencies and in our technology solutions for emergency communications during disaster events. For Hurricane Ida, the LWIN system was not as much a problem as the telephone circuits. Our Louisiana emergency communication staffs have established good vendor relationships and situational awareness to quickly identify, assess, and resolve LWIN system issues.

The more concerned matter we want to ensure we bring to your attention is centered on telephone circuits where FCC is the regulating body for these carriers as well as the need to raise the awareness and funding for emergency communications at the state and local levels.

The areas of improvement and related requests we identified today will provide for a more efficient and rapid response to any disaster event Louisiana or other states may face in the future.

I would like to thank you for time and attention today, this concludes my statement.