

# United States Senate

September 16, 2021

COMMITTEES  
APPROPRIATIONS  
BANKING, HOUSING, AND  
URBAN AFFAIRS  
BUDGET  
JUDICIARY  
SMALL BUSINESS AND  
ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Mr. John Stankey  
Chief Executive Officer, AT&T Inc.  
208 South Akard Street  
Dallas, TX 75202

Dear Mr. Stankey,

I write to you today regarding AT&T's failure to maintain network operations during Hurricane Ida, including the emergency first responder call systems that so many parishes and cities rely on that AT&T exclusively serves. As you know, on Sunday, August 29th, Hurricane Ida made landfall in southeast Louisiana as a Category 4 storm. When Hurricane Ida hit, AT&T's network—including the First Responder Network (FirstNet)—failed. Countless Louisianans were left without the ability to complete calls or send texts. For example, when AT&T's network went down, the residents of New Orleans had to wait 13 hours until the city's 911 call system was restored. The situation became so dire that the only recourse first responders had available to them was to take to the streets and social media alerting people that they would need to walk to a nearby fire or police station to get help. The failure of AT&T's network impacted people from all across the state, with at least four parishes reporting 911 systems being down. When Louisianans tried to make calls to 911 the calls couldn't be completed. When loved ones tried to contact family and friends they couldn't. Residents even lacked the ability to send and receive life-saving updates. This is unacceptable, especially when contrasted with widespread reports of competitor networks faring better.

This is also not the first time AT&T's network and 911 system have failed when it has been needed most. When flash floods hammered Baton Rouge this past May, AT&T's line servicing 911 calls failed for almost two hours. The May failure forced calls originating in one parish to be rerouted to an adjacent parish which can lead to confusion between callers, dispatchers and first responders.

It is my understanding that AT&T is the service provider for all 911 call centers in Louisiana. Further, it is my understanding that AT&T was awarded a 25-year, \$6.5 billion contract to build and maintain a nationwide network for public safety—FirstNet. In fact, FirstNet came about after the terror attacks on 9/11 highlighted the problems inherent in our 911 call systems. FirstNet promised to absolutely ensure communications services for first responders during the most serious and unprecedented disasters. Unfortunately, emergency calls didn't make it to first responders and there is widespread acknowledgment from government officials and emergency responders that much of the call routing technology they rely on is antiquated and in need of replacement or upgrade.

As the state of Louisiana rebuilds from a year of record-breaking storms, I ask for answers to the following questions:

1. Why did AT&T's network suffer greater outages than its competitors?
  - a. Is AT&T aware of customer complaints that their network failed when competitor networks continued to perform?
2. How much money has AT&T invested in deploying and expanding FirstNet coverage in Louisiana over the past five years?
3. Would the deployment of additional generators or battery storage systems have helped keep the network operational?
4. The ESInet online-call routing system is designed to tackle the problems associated with conventional switching stations that are vulnerable to flooding and power outages. ESInet is designed to ensure that 911 networks are able to survive and complete 911 calls even if certain parts of the system are not operating. AT&T is slated to upgrade the first 911 call system in Louisiana with ESInet in the coming months. Why has it taken so long to implement ESInet?
5. Does AT&T plan on upgrading other 911 systems throughout the state to ESInet?
6. What is AT&T doing to promote resiliency of their cellular network and 911 call routing system?

It will be weeks before a full assessment of Hurricane Ida's damage will be available. However, what we do know is that when Louisiana needed AT&T most, AT&T failed. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



John Kennedy  
U.S. Senator