

# June 2017 FCC Meeting Recap: Commission Adopts “Blue Alerts” Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

June 26, 2017

At its June Open Meeting the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) unanimously adopted a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) to create a new “Blue Alert” code for the nation’s Emergency Alert System (EAS). This code is modeled on the highly successful Amber Alerts used during instances of child abduction. Blue Alerts would notify the public when there is actionable information related to a law enforcement officer who is missing, seriously injured or killed in the line of duty, or if there is an imminent and credible threat to an officer.

The Department of Justice, through the coordination efforts mandated by the Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu National Blue Alert Act of 2015, had previously identified the need for a dedicated Blue Alert EAS code. The Department of Justice Deputy National Blue Alerts Coordinator Vince Davenport spoke before the Public Safety Bureau presented the item to the Commission, emphasizing how the dedicated Blue Alert code would dramatically improve the effectiveness of the existing Blue Alert system. Currently 27 states have their own Blue Alert plans.

In his statement, Chairman Pai explained how the Blue Alerts are intended to prevent tragedies like the attack that killed New York Police Department officers Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu in 2015. The attacker had shot his girlfriend in Baltimore and posted on social media that he was going to New York City to attack police. Despite having an idea of where in New York City the attacker was, Baltimore police were unable to communicate that information effectively to the NYPD or general public in the immediate area.

The Commission seeks comment on several issues, including the effectiveness of the EAS to deliver Blue Alerts, whether Blue Alerts can be sufficiently geographically targeted, how Blue Alerts can be incorporated into states’ existing Blue Alert plans, the proposed alerts’ costs and benefits, and how the public will likely respond to Blue Alerts. The Commission is proposing that any required technical changes to equipment be made within 6 months of the effective date of the rules. Under the rules, it will be up to state and local authorities when to issue a Blue Alert.