



Press Statement

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NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS URGE THE FCC TO CREATE MULTILINGUAL EMERGENCY ALERTS AS NATION COMMEMORATES 10th ANNIVERSARY OF HURRICANE KATRINA

WASHINGTON, D.C. (August 26, 2015): The Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council (MMTC), the nation’s leading advocate for diversity and inclusion in the media and telecom industries, along with 25 other national and regional civil rights and consumer organizations, has urged the Federal Communications Commission to require multilingual emergency alerts in key markets where sizeable populations are non-English speaking. This call to action comes three days before the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina that left thousands of non-English speaking residents without access to medical facilities, emergency support, and their loved ones due to the breakdown of the city’s communications infrastructure and the failure of the nation’s existing emergency alert system to transmit emergency information in their native languages.

“Hurricane Katrina will be commemorated this week, but it should never be forgotten, because it can happen again,” stated MMTC President and CEO Kim M. Keenan. “For families whose primary language is not English, emergency information before, during, and after a natural disaster is the lifeline that could mean the difference between life and death. Upgrading our nation’s emergency broadcasting system to serve a nation that is increasingly diverse in ethnicity and language must be a priority to ensure that no one is left behind in a disaster.”

MMTC, along with several of the signers, filed the first “Katrina Petition” on September 20, 2005, to highlight the impact of this structural breakdown. In summary, the Katrina petition proposed that the FCC adopt a “designated hitter” system that would designate which station(s) in each radio market would be responsible for providing multilingual emergency information if no other station in that language remained on the air during or in the wake of the emergency. Ten years later, the FCC has still not acted, and state broadcast associations have not come up with plans to ensure multilingual emergency service.

“This is one of the most critical issues that the FCC has ever faced,” stated David Honig, MMTC’s President Emeritus and the author of the 2005 petition. “We are talking about the lives of thousands of people who are not served by broadcasters in their native language. When wireless towers went down during Katrina, broadcast stations survived, and because of this, station owners and operators should be proactive in updating their alerts to be multilingual. It must be part of the evaluation of their fitness as license holders with the FCC and the American public.”

All of the signers on this letter addressed to the FCC Chairman also point to the fact that the greatest beneficiaries of multilingual emergency communications are first responders – as well as the taxpayers who underwrite their operations. The cost of rescuing and providing emergency health care is much less when the public has access to essential information in an emergency. The full text of the letter can be found [here](#).

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About MMTC:

The Multicultural Media, Telecom and Internet Council (MMTC) is a non-partisan, national nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and preserving equal opportunity and civil rights in the mass media, telecommunications and broadband industries, and closing the digital divide. MMTC is generally recognized as the nation’s leading advocate for minority advancement in communications.