



Press Statement

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MMTC AND LULAC TO FCC: WE NEED ACTION TO ENSURE MULTILINGUAL EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 4, 2016): After nearly eleven years, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), on March 31, issued its Multilingual Emergency Alert System (EAS) Order (“EAS Order”) essentially rejecting the “Katrina Petition” filed following Hurricane Katrina in 2005 by the Multicultural Media, Telecommunications, and Internet Council (MMTC), the Independent Spanish Broadcasters Association, and the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ.

The Petition, driven by the events leading up to, during, and after Hurricane Katrina, sought to ensure that in life-threatening emergencies, such as hurricanes that disable telephone and some broadcast communications, at least one radio station would pre-commit to providing life-saving information in widely spoken languages other than English.

The FCC’s own 2006 Katrina Advisory Committee, headed by former NTIA Director Nancy Victory, endorsed relief similar to the reforms recommended by the Katrina Petition. Fifty-seven national organizations endorsed the Katrina Petition. This overwhelming support for the Petition was not noted in the FCC’s Order.

For the over 100,000 Louisianans not proficient in English, their world went dark during Katrina when the only Spanish language radio station went off the air for eight critical days – along with all of New Orleans’ wireline and wireless service. These residents were unable to find out “Where do I go to find shelter?” “How can I find my children?” and “Is the water safe to drink?” For the terrified multitude taking refuge on rooftops as the water rose, there was often little hope for survival. With no multilingual communications, first responders were left to resolve this issue under extraordinary circumstances.

“While the EAS Order instituted a requirement that stations report on any actions they may have taken to ensure multilingual communications in an emergency, there is no requirement for them to actually provide multilingual emergency communications,” stated MMTC President and CEO Kim Keenan. “In its present form, the EAS Order does not move us even a step closer to ensuring that our nation’s 25 million multilingual Americans, including children, the elderly, and the disabled, actually receive life-saving information before, during, and immediately after an emergency. As always, MMTC stands ready to collaborate with the FCC, broadcasters, and first responders to define an easy, inexpensive, and efficient method to provide life-saving information to multilingual populations in emergencies. If a broadcast license means anything at all, it should mean that broadcasters must deliver to their most vulnerable listeners the life-saving information they need when they need it the most. The penalty for an individual’s lack of English proficiency must never be death.”

In his dissent, FCC Commissioner Michael O’Rielly pointed out that the agency did not perform a meaningful cost-benefit analysis. He is right: this issue was important enough to justify such an analysis. Clearly, the cost of human lives, first responder efforts, and impact on public safety for a terrified population would have shown that the benefits of multilingual information far outweighed the costs.

[More]

**MMTC AND LULAC DEPLORE FCC REFUSAL – AFTER 11 YEARS –
TO ENSURE MULTILINGUAL EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS
April 4, 2016**

LULAC Executive Director Brent Wilkes issued this statement:

“As the nation’s largest Hispanic organization in the country, we along with MMTC have supported efforts to persuade the FCC to ensure the availability of multilingual communications in emergencies. Virtually every national Hispanic organization has also voiced its endorsement of this campaign.

“If the people without emergency communications were Anglos in Grosse Pointe, the FCC would have granted the Katrina Petition 11 years ago.

“The Katrina Petition is critical for the Hispanic community, and we will continue our efforts to ensure that Latinos are afforded the same public safety services as other communities.”

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 social justice in the mass media, telecommunications and broadband industries, and closing the digital divide. MMTC is generally recognized as the nation’s leading advocate for multicultural advancement in communications.

About LULAC:

The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) is the nation's largest and oldest civil rights volunteer-based organization that empowers Hispanic Americans and builds strong Latino communities. Headquartered in Washington, D.C. with 1,000 councils around the United States and Puerto Rico, LULAC's programs, services and advocacy address the most important issues for Latinos, meeting critical needs of today and the future.