

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 16, 2019

The Honorable Ajit V. Pai
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai,

As you work to implement changes to the Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system in the aftermath of recent wildfires, we ask that you promptly consider any additional measures necessary to ensure that any changes to the system do not impair its ability to provide rapid earthquake early warning alerts.

Recent seismic activity along the West Coast demonstrates the need to continue developing rapid early alerts for earthquakes. Last Friday, a 4.6 magnitude earthquake struck the Seattle region in Washington. A magnitude 6.4 earthquake hit Southern California on July 4, followed by a 7.1 magnitude earthquake a day later – the strongest earthquake to hit the state in 20 years. While the town of Ridgecrest was too close to receive an alert through the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) ShakeAlert earthquake early warning system before strong shaking began, other areas could have received WEA alerts in time: 15 seconds for California City, 21 seconds for Barstow and 48 seconds for Los Angeles. But these alert times would be reduced by WEA delivery latency. The success of earthquake early warning relies on extremely rapid, low-latency alert times. As a result, the recent changes to the WEA system to better geo-fence wildfire and other emergency alerts could unintentionally delay notifications and severely weaken the effectiveness of the ShakeAlert system.

Therefore, we ask that you work with the relevant stakeholders, including USGS, to ensure that the recent WEA changes do not inadvertently impair the ShakeAlert system's ability to provide specialized and timely earthquake warnings. We understand that on June 21, USGS asked the Federal Communications Commission to consider various changes to the WEA rules to make wireless earthquake alerts more effective. We ask that your agency act on this request from USGS for clarification, waiver and rule changes as soon as possible. We also ask that you promptly address any other issues posed by the new WEA rules that stakeholders believe will affect the distribution of wireless earthquake alerts.

We appreciate the work the Commission has done to date on improving the WEA alerting system, and we look forward to working with you to continue improving emergency response capabilities in our nation.

Given the recent earthquakes in Washington and Southern California, the effectiveness of earthquake early alerts to our constituents is more critical than ever. Please provide within 30 days of receipt of this letter an update on the Commission's plan to address USGS's request. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

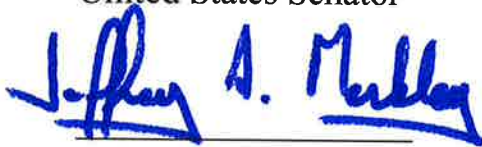
Sincerely,



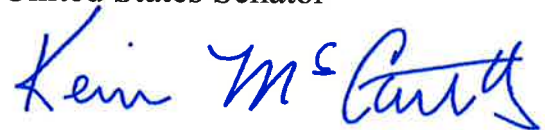
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Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Kevin McCarthy
House Republican Leader



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator



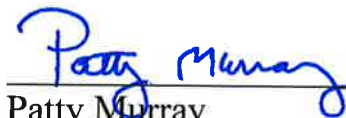
Ken Calvert
Member of Congress



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



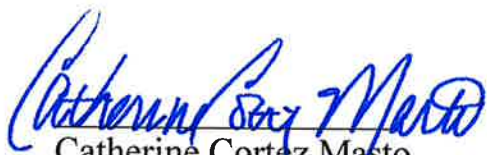
Adam Schiff
Member of Congress



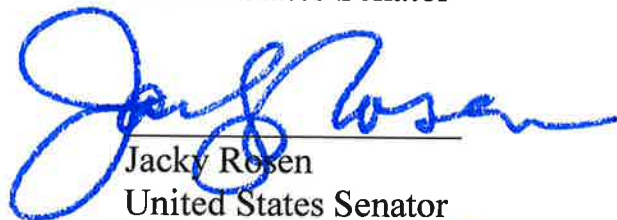
Patty Murray
United States Senator





Paul Cook
Member of Congress



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator


Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

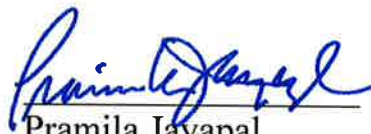

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

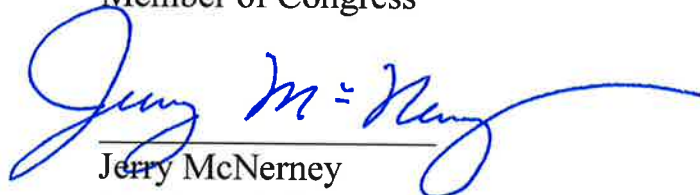

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