

Floor Statement on H.R. 3403, the "911 Modernization and Public Safety Act of 2007"

Statement of Congressman John D. Dingell, Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce

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ON H.R. 3403, THE "911 MODERNIZATION AND PUBLIC SAFETY ACT OF 2007"
November 13, 2007

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 3403, the "911 Modernization and Public Safety Act of 2007".

This legislation ensures that consumers using Voice over Internet Protocol or VoIP technology can access the 911 system. It also requires the development of a national plan to ensure that the 911 system continues to evolve.

Consumers expect that when they place a call to 911 using a wireline phone, wireless phone, or any other type of technology, the emergency operator who answers will send the right type of first responder to the correct location in the shortest time possible. The ability to dial 911 and reach an emergency operator is so integral to our daily lives that we teach our children from the earliest moment how to dial 911.

As our communications system has evolved, so too has the 911 system. We have seen this before with the introduction of wireless phone service. As more consumers began using cell phones, Congress passed legislation to ensure that the 911 system could accommodate emergency calls made over the wireless network.

Over the last few years, VoIP technology has provided a new way for consumers to make calls using the Internet. H.R. 3404 ensures that consumers using VoIP service are able to access 911 as easily as consumers using wireline or wireless services. H.R. 3403 will give VoIP providers access to the components they need to provide 911 service and will extend the liability protections afforded to wireline and wireless carriers today to VoIP providers, public safety officials, and end users in relation to VoIP 911 calls.

The constantly evolving nature of technology can present a challenge to legislators. H.R. 3403 meets that challenge by ensuring that our 911 system continues to adapt. It requires the development of a national plan to migrate to an Internet Protocol-enabled 911 system. It also amends an existing grant program to allow funding for public safety answering points that are moving to an IP-enabled system.

As technology evolves, it is important that public safety communications also evolve. Too often public safety is left behind, burdened by yesterday's technology and yesterday's network. H.R. 3403 therefore requires that public safety representatives participate in the formation of the national plan. This will help ensure that public safety has access to the communications platform of the future.

Moving to an IP-enabled 911 system will also benefit consumers with disabilities. H.R. 3403 requires that the national plan address solutions for providing 911 and enhanced 911 services to members of the disabilities community who may not be able to speak to or hear an emergency operator. By including those representing the disabilities community in the formation of the national plan, we will ensure that all consumers are able to access emergency services.

Because consumers rely on 911, Congress must ensure that the 911 system is reliable. H.R. 3403 fulfills this duty by addressing the addition of VoIP service to the marketplace and by establishing a pathway to the future of the 911 system. This important measure has strong bipartisan support, including the support of the Committee on Energy and Commerce Ranking Member, Rep. Barton, and the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Internet, Rep. Upton.

I commend Rep. Gordon for his excellent work on this legislation. I also thank the other members of the 911 Caucus, and Representatives Eshoo, Shimkus, and Pickering for their important and ongoing work in the area of emergency communications.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 3403.

Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce
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