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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEB SITE: <http://commerce.senate.gov>

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June 4, 2014

Mr. Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

The communications sector is part of the nation's key critical infrastructure and is an integral component of the U.S. economy, underlying the operations of all businesses, public safety organizations, and government. The sector has evolved from predominantly a provider of voice services into a diverse, competitive, and interconnected industry using terrestrial, satellite, and wireless transmission systems. Currently, the sector is moving to all-Internet Protocol (IP) networks.

During times of emergencies, effective communications before, during, and after the incident can drastically alter the outcome of that incident. Yet, as proven during Superstorm Sandy, the Boston Marathon bombings, and other emergencies, communication networks can be brought down by congestion as friends and families flood lines in search of loved ones. Furthermore, the loss of communications facilities could have cascading impacts on other key critical infrastructure sectors due to interdependencies between the sectors. Therefore it is important that the nation's communications networks and systems are resilient and rapidly restored after a natural or manmade disaster. We are interested in knowing how the communications sector will ensure the reliability of the nation's communications networks in an IP-environment. As such, we ask GAO to answer the following questions:

- To what extent has the communications sector transitioned from traditional copper-based networks to IP networks?
- As part of the nation's critical infrastructure, what action has the federal government taken to ensure the reliability and robustness of communication networks that have transitioned to IP?

- What key challenges do IP network operators face during times of crises and how do the challenges affect consumers?
- To what extent do priority access programs for emergency preparedness communications exist for IP networks?

We request that GAO inform the Committee regarding any other issues of concern that it may uncover during its examination of issues related to IP networks operating during times of crises. Thank you for your attention to this request. If you have any questions about this request, please have your staff contact John Branscome at (202) 224-9340.

Sincerely,






