

# CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE

STATE CAPITOL  
SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA  
95814

August 24, 2018

Hans Vestberg  
Chief Executive Officer  
Verizon Communications  
1 Verizon Way  
Basking Ridge, NJ 07920

**RE: Verizon's intentional throttling of First Responder data during Wildfires**

Dear Mr. Hans Vestberg:

We wanted to reach out to you today about your company's policy of increasing the price of your data plans during times of crisis here in the State of California.

We were absolutely shocked that your corporation made a decision to throttle firefighter and emergency personnel cell and data coverage during the Golden State's unprecedented firestorms. Even after being asked to stop the throttling by emergency managers, the egregious behavior continued. Verizon's unconscionable action made a dangerous job of a firefighter even worse and in the name of profit, hurt their ability to protect the communities they are sworn to protect.

This was clearly not just one person or a "customer support mistake." Nor was this a small reduction in speed – according to the affected fire department, Verizon slowed the emergency personnel connection by 1/200th of the normal rate. Firefighters trying to coordinate fire attacks and evacuations and who were busy saving lives and structures couldn't communicate with each other.

When they explained to your company about the slowdown and the emergency situation, and asked for your company's help, the answer wasn't just "no", but was in fact met with a sales pitch. The Department was forced to spend their time figuring out how to buy an upgraded plan, instead of fighting fire, just so Verizon would increase their bandwidth. This took days and numerous communications and not just one customer service contact. While this forced upgrade was taking place, firefighters had to borrow phones and data links in order to communicate in dire situations. We are just blown away by this.

The Mendocino Complex Fire, where this travesty occurred, is now the largest fire in state history and has burned more than 415,000 acres, destroyed over 150 homes and took the life of a firefighter.

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To make matters worse, the news of this egregious action all came to light, not from your corporation, or even from firefighters who experienced it, but from a legal brief to the Federal Communications Commission. And according to the fire department, this was not the first time this throttling has happened. There is also evidence you conducted the same throttling during the Thomas Fire in December of 2017.

Lack of communication can be dangerous and deadly. Emergency personnel rely on cell and data technology for critical activities and even small delays can have devastating and life threatening impacts.

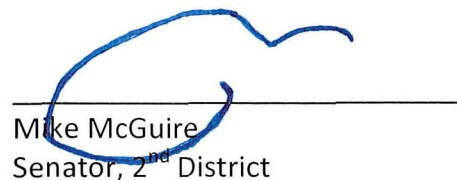
Clearly this behavior is a direct violation of your duty under federal statutes governing telecommunications to serve the public interest, convenience and necessity. Taking advantage of first responders during an emergency for commercial gain is unacceptable and a threat to the health and safety of all Californians.

We will be holding hearings on the throttling issue to examine exactly how/why this dangerous practice happened, and how we can make sure it never happens again. Further, we demand Verizon makes a public commitment to never again throttle emergency responders during times of disaster. Our questions to you for which we expect answers are the following:

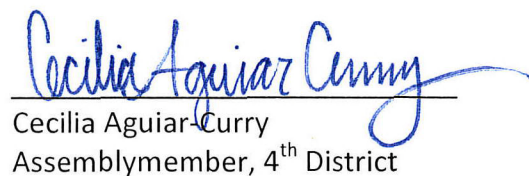
1. How many times has this happened?
2. How many years has it been a corporate policy to impede first responders' communications during times of crisis?
3. Where and when has this happened before?
4. What other emergencies have forced responders to deal with this kind of throttling in the middle of a crisis?

This is corporate irresponsibility at its highest and there is obviously no excuse possible to justify this most egregious behavior. We need to make sure this NEVER happens again.

Sincerely,



Mike McGuire  
Senator, 2<sup>nd</sup> District



Cecilia Aguiar-Curry  
Assemblymember, 4<sup>th</sup> District



Kevin de León  
Senator, 24<sup>th</sup> District




Jim Wood  
Assemblymember, 2<sup>nd</sup> District




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Bill Dodd  
Senator, 3<sup>rd</sup> District



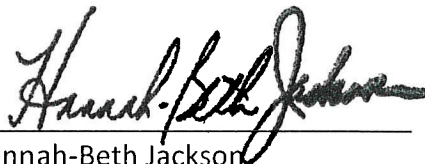
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Jerry Hill  
Senator, 13<sup>th</sup> District



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Ben Hueso  
Senator, 30<sup>th</sup> District



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Hannah-Beth Jackson  
Senator, 19<sup>th</sup> District