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Written Testimony of Erin Monroe Wesley
Cox Communications Hurricane Ida Response
Submission to the Public Service Commission
September 22, 2021

Good Afternoon Commissioners. I'm Erin Monroe Wesley and I serve as the Vice President of Government and Public Affairs for Cox Communications. I am joined today by Anthony Pope, our Senior Vice President and Region Manager, serving the states of Louisiana, Florida and Georgia. I am also joined by Chari Lawrence, our Regulatory Affairs Manager and point of contact for the Commission.

We want to thank you for giving us the opportunity to provide an update on our Hurricane Ida restoration efforts, in addition to the daily updates we've been providing via text and email since shortly after the start of our recovery process.

Our goal today is to briefly highlight our Business Continuity Planning process, update the Commission on our assessment and restoration efforts, share the various forms of assistance available to customers and spotlight our resilient Louisiana workforce.

When it comes to storm preparation and response, our work begins well before a storm makes landfall. As you know, Cox has a comprehensive Business Continuity Plan with a formal structure in place to prepare and respond to natural and man-made disasters. We have filed our disaster response plan annually with the Commission since 2017.

We have dedicated personnel at our corporate office as well as an Incident Command Team who guide us in the planning and execution of our disaster response. Our operational teams prepare annually with a simulated event and a "table-top" activation. We also conduct a postmortem after each event to reflect on lessons learned and to make improvements to our disaster response protocols to ensure that we are adopting best practices.

We began meeting as a disaster response team on Friday, August 27th and have continued to meet on a daily cadence as a functional response team. Among our initial steps when a disaster hits is to account for our employees. We were able to account for all of our Louisiana employees within 36 hours of the storm's landfall. All of our employees reported being safe. We had about 30% of our Louisiana employee base that needed immediate storm assistance. Through our internal efforts, Cox has contributed over \$330,000 to support those employees in need.

Within 24 hours of Ida's impact, our crews began assessing damage to our network. It takes the effort of thousands of people to make this recovery process a success. This includes an additional 500 personnel and contractors from nine states who mobilized in Louisiana to assess our network damage and restore service outages caused by Hurricane Ida.

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In our Baton Rouge service area, we assessed roughly 2,100 miles of our plant and identified more than 85 miles of damage. In our metro New Orleans service area, we assessed roughly 2,600 miles of our plant and identified 150 miles of damage.

One of the greatest factors of success in our recovery process is to create a strong business alliance with utilities. You've heard us say before that we follow power. We partner with power companies to restore our services as our equipment is connected to power poles. Through our relationships with our partners in power, we knew early on that Hurricane Ida was an unprecedented storm that caused significant damage to the electric grid.

The early and frequent communication between Cox and its partners in power has been critical for our Hurricane Ida response and is essential for future storm restoration efforts.

Our goal in storm restoration is to maximize recovery by ecosystem area which affords us the ability to restore large amounts of customers online. Within this ecosystem, we prioritize repairs to critical infrastructure such as first responders, government services, hospitals and schools. We do this by sequencing our work as follows:

- Fiber backbone network – We work to ensure entry of fiber into our metro network from our national fiber network.
- Metro network – We work to ensure fiber connectivity between our critical facilities.
- Nodes – We then shift to repair work at the node level. Nodes are physical devices attached to our network that service hundreds of customer homes and businesses. We have thousands of nodes that are spread out in neighborhoods and business parks throughout our service areas.
- Strands and Feeders – We make repairs to strands and feeders attached to power lines.
- Down Drops – Our down drop work entails restoring lines that deliver customer signals from neighborhood nodes to single homes or business customers.
- Customer Premise Equipment and Trouble Calls – Our technicians enter customer homes or businesses to replace damaged equipment or troubleshoot connectivity issues.

Communication during a disaster is key. We strive to provide timely and accurate communications to local emergency operations centers, key local, state and federal officials, customers and the media.

Although we keep the customer experience at the forefront of our work, we continue to explore opportunities to close the gap and improve our communications to customers. This includes the development of accurate outage maps that will inform customers of estimated restoration times.

As part of our ongoing communications with customers about frequently asked questions and the various forms of assistance available in the aftermath of a natural disaster, we direct customers to our website for up-to-date recovery information.

The Cox storm response website features importation information about our credit policy, informing customers who are out of service for less than 7 days to contact us.

We also inform customers that they will not be assessed a late fee or be charged for damaged Cox owned equipment or technician visits during the recovery process. We suspend the disconnection of services during times of disaster. We also grant customers the option to suspend their services for up to 6 months at no charge while our equipment remains in their homes during the repair process. Cox will preserve customer phone numbers and email addresses during this time.

I will conclude my marks by highlighting the significant pace of our recovery. At the peak of the storm, nearly 100% of our greater New Orleans customers were offline and 87% of our Baton Rouge area customers were offline. Today, I'm happy to report that we have restored services to 88% of our greater New Orleans customers and 98% of our Baton Rouge customers.

We know that the recovery process is never easy. We recognize the importance of our services to our customers, not only during times of disaster but particularly during this period in time where more and more families are working from home and students are learning virtually.

I want to especially thank our Cox crews who have sacrificed time with their families and who have prolonged their own recovery needs to support the restoration of services to our customers.

We have completed our recovery work in the Baton Rouge area. In the greater New Orleans area, we are continuing to make repairs to our network while focusing on individual customer and business needs.

Lastly, I mentioned earlier our giving to employees. I also want to highlight our commitment to communities impacted by the storm. Through the support of the James M. Cox Foundation and leadership of our Region Manager Anthony Pope, Cox has contributed \$125,000 to five organizations committed to Hurricane Ida relief efforts. In New Orleans, these organizations include Second Harvest Food Bank, United Way of Southeast Louisiana and Forward Together. In Baton Rouge, these organizations include Capital Area United Way and Healthy BR.

Again, we appreciate the opportunity to share our recovery journey with the Commission. Thank you for your ongoing support as we move to finalize our restoration efforts.