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Department of Public Service Investigates Emergency Service Phone Outages

ALBANY — At the request of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, the New York State Department of Public Service today announced it is investigating recent telephone network disruptions affecting 911 emergency service to more than 400,000 Verizon New York and Frontier Communications customers in the lower Hudson Valley, including portions of Sullivan, Putnam, Ulster and Westchester counties on Thursday, Nov. 12.

“The public relies on 911 service as a lifeline to ensure they get fast and immediate assistance should any kind of life-threatening or other safety emergency occurs,” said Department Chief Executive Officer Audrey Zibelman. “The DPS investigation will seek to determine the root cause of the outage and other underlying facts in an effort to understand how this occurred and help prevent future outages.”

The Verizon outage in Westchester, Putnam, Dutchess and Ulster counties potentially impacted more than 400,000 customers. As a result of the outage, affected customers could not call 911 in the event of an emergency. The Verizon outage began at 2:30 PM, with services gradually being restored starting at 5:30 PM, with full restoration occurring at 6:45 PM.

Meanwhile, the Frontier outage affected the Hamlet of Roscoe in Sullivan County and impacted more than 900 customers. The outage initially began in the early afternoon with intermittent service, but had become a complete outage by evening. Full service was restored by midnight.

Both companies responded to the service problems, working in concert with State and county emergency services agencies. Department staff monitored company restoration efforts throughout the service disruptions and was in contact with the relevant county emergency response agencies.

The Department’s investigation will evaluate why back-up systems designed to ensure continued service operations failed, and what improvements might be needed. The goal of the review would be to prevent and mitigate future outages. The investigation is expected to take two months.