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Media Contact:

National Association of State 911 Administrators

Harriet Rennie-Brown, Executive Director

(517) 243-2075

Harriet.Rennie-Brown@nasna911.org

Public Safety Officials Warn that Older Phones May Cease Operating in 2022

TRAVERSE CITY, MICHIGAN – November 17, 2021

The National Association of State 911 Administrators (NASNA) is issuing a warning to consumers that older phones may cease operating in early 2022 due to the retirement of 3G networks and support for phones using 3G service. This may include other devices that use 3G connectivity, such as some medical alert devices, tablets, smart watches, home security systems, and other devices.

“It is vitally important that the public be aware that national 3G networks will no longer work sometime early next year. These networks support older phones and devices that won’t work after the 3G network goes away” said Harriet Rennie-Brown, Executive Director of NASNA.

The nation’s three major wireless carriers (AT&T, Verizon, and T-Mobile) have each announced that they plan on discontinuing 3G service in favor of 4G (LTE) and 5G service next year. According to the FCC’s website, AT&T will discontinue service in February, T-Mobile/Sprint will discontinue service between March and July, and Verizon will discontinue service at the end of 2022.¹

Most users of these services will be notified directly by the carriers if this discontinuation affects them. However, users of older phones used for 9-1-1 only purposes may not be notified if they do not have active service with the provider. It has long been the practice of some organizations for the homeless or domestic violence shelters to provide clients with older phones with no

¹ See <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/plan-ahead-phase-out-3g-cellular-networks-and-service>

service, since those phones could still be used to call 9-1-1 in an emergency. Users of those older 9-1-1 only phones should be aware that they may not work after 3G service is discontinued.

Low income individuals who are concerned that their 9-1-1 only phones may no longer be supported should consider applying for service through the federal Lifeline Program. Information regarding eligibility and participating providers can be found at <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/>.

NASNA is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt membership organization representing the nation's state 9-1-1 administrators, representing 48 states and the District of Columbia.