

Feb. 8, 2022

Testimony: HB 331, Regulation of Amateur Radio Station Antenna Structures
Hearing: Environment and Transportation
Position: Support

Tom Henry
Amateur Radio Communicator

Mr. Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify in favor of HB331.

My name is Tom Henry, and I am a federally licensed amateur radio operator, call sign N3TJR.

The name "amateur" does not indicate a lack of skill or training, but is labeled as such because we are prohibited from accepting compensation.

All who desire to be a licensed operator are required to take classes and be tested to obtain their FCC license and are regulated under Part 97 of their rules pertaining to amateur radio and the conduct of operators. They participate in contests, clubs, and preparedness activities to enhance their skills.

But what if communication infrastructure is hampered or disabled? That is precisely what happened on what we know as 9-11.

Investigations into radio communications during that event discovered that protocols that distinguished each emergency department were hampered by the lack of interoperability, damaged or failed network infrastructure, and overwhelmed by simultaneous communication between superiors and subordinates.

About 500 amateur radio operators worked during disaster and recovery in conjunction with first responders, and shadowed some New York City and medical officials, handled medical traffic, and assisted the Red Cross and the Salvation Army as well.

The events of that day persuaded me to obtain my license, and since then, I have studied to advance my skills and privileges.

One main asset of Amateur Radio is the support of ones' community; for instance, a long term disaster like a hurricane when normal systems can be down for days. Many like myself concentrate on preparing ourselves for such events.

This bill will allow some protection for operators who wish to help yet cannot be onsite by allowing them reasonable accommodation to erect antenna structures to advance communications in the event such emergencies occur.

Part 97 defines “Reasonable Accommodation” as minimum structure sufficient to accommodate effective amateur service communications.

One operator I am familiar who is Don Yerti (call sign K3DON). Being legally blind, he cannot easily be on location for emergencies that utilize his skills. However, he is very proficient working remotely from home, running a local communication net, and transmitting traffic and updates in emergencies. Incidentally, he was the only Amateur in the community to report to the National Weather Service a tornado that touched down in Fallston back in 2007 through the ARES/RACES. The NWS confirmed the touchdown. This saved lives.

One of the best examples of working in coordination with first responders can be found in an organization known as the Baltimore County Auxiliary Communications Service (BaCo ACS). It has been in existence since 2006, and has been recognized as in the same light as volunteer fire and EMS personnel. I have submitted a copy of an article with my written submission highlighting the creation of the service (Dec 2009, CQ Magazine).

This bill will help over 11,000 federally licensed individuals in Maryland. There are over 3 million operators worldwide, over 765,000 of them in the US, (*US source: ARRL.org, Feb 12, 2020*). The national number has increased 1.2% on average per year since Sept. 2001.

We would never want to see another 9-11, Katrina, or earthquakes in Haiti or Puerto Rico again. However, there will be events that will require communication lines be established to protect lives and property. That’s when amateur radio is at its best.

I am open to any questions you may have, and thank you in advance for your consideration.

Regards,
Tom Henry
7817 Highpoint Road
Parkville, MD 21234