

Technology and Disability Policy Highlights

November 2017

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Overview

In the wake of a record-breaking hurricane season and the California wildfires, the Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system received public scrutiny and concern as to why it was not uniformly used to deliver emergency messages. One challenge of using WEA was its current limitation on the granular targeting of alerts, which according to one Harris County Official is why his local government did not use the system during Hurricane Harvey, "because it does not want to potentially alert the entire county when a WEA message may only pertain to a certain portion of the county.” The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) addressed this concern in the Enhanced WEA rulemaking, that, among other things, mandated more precise geo-targeting. In a recent *Order on Reconsideration in the Matter of Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA)* [**PS Docket No. 15-91**], the FCC denied CTIA’s (wireless industry association) and the Competitive Carriers Association's (CCA) separate petitions to defer compliance deadlines for embedded references (i.e., URLs) and the more granular geo-targeting requirement. Regarding the latter, the Order stated that “we find no basis for granting relief.” Therefore, the “best approximates” geo-targeting compliance deadline remained November 1, 2017, for all participating providers. In efforts to maintain regional carriers’ voluntary participation in WEA, the *Order* did grant relief from embedded resources compliance deadline to all carriers except for except for AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, Sprint and U.S. Cellular.

In Wireless RERC News, we are continuing data collection on our latest Survey of User Needs (SUN). If you have not taken it yet, please do. The SUN is the Wireless RERC's cornerstone survey on wireless technology use by people with disabilities. User responses will help designers and engineers make new wireless devices and services that are accessible to and usable by people with a variety of disabilities. Data from the SUN also provides important information to the wireless industry, government regulators, and other researchers to help them make wireless technologies and services more accessible and useful. Please [Take the Survey](http://b.gatech.edu/2yvCHnz) and [Share the Survey](http://www.wirelessrerc.gatech.edu/wireless-rerc-launches-latest-survey-user-needs) so we can continue to provide evidence-based policy and technology recommendations.

This issue also includes news about universal design, virtual reality, wearables, accessible gaming, exoskeletons and more.

**Click the headings below to link directly to a particular section.**

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Regulatory Activities

**FCC Open Meeting Agenda**

November 22, 2017 – The FCC released the tentative meeting agenda for the open meeting on December 14, 2017. The agenda is ambitious an includes addressing New Emergency Alert System Event Code for Blue Alerts, Rural Health Care Support Mechanism, Twilight Towers Public Notice, CMRS Presumption Report & Order, Electronic Delivery of Cable Communications, National Television Multiple Ownership Rule, *and* the declaratory ruling on Restoring Internet Freedom. Given the controversy and deeply divided perspectives regarding Internet Freedom versus Net Neutrality, seemingly the agenda could have only included consideration of the Restoring Internet Freedom Order and still be full of commentary and discussion. The proposal contends that Net Neutrality is a threat to investment and innovation and a “light-touch regulatory framework” is needed. Some consumer groups argue that repealing Net Neutrality rules would affect parity of access to content and services, potentially further excluding socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. In 2015, broadband was classified as a telecommunications service rather than an information service. This reclassification, thus, extended Section 255 of the Telecommunications Act to the provision of broadband internet access services, requiring equitable access by people with disabilities. As such, people with disabilities and advocates are deeply concerned about the impact of Internet Freedom on their hard-won and sometimes tenuous freedom to access current and emerging communications technologies.

#### Additional Information:

[FCC Announces Tentative Agenda for December Open Meeting](https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-announces-tentative-agenda-december-open-meeting-3)

[<https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-announces-tentative-agenda-december-open-meeting-3>]

[Proposal to Restore Internet Freedom](https://www.fcc.gov/document/proposal-restore-internet-freedom)

Public Draft: [Pdf](https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-347927A1.pdf) - [Txt](https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-347927A1.txt)

[Net Neutrality and people with disabilities](https://www.computerworld.com/article/3240999/net-neutrality/net-neutrality-and-people-with-disabilities.html)

<https://www.computerworld.com/article/3240999/net-neutrality/net-neutrality-and-people-with-disabilities.html>

**FCC’s Steady March Towards Improved Wireless Emergency Alerts Continues**

November 14, 2017 - The idea to use the advanced GPS technology in many modern smartphones and wireless devices is not new. A 1998 FCC rule, Enhanced 911 Services, began requiring wireless providers to patch through any emergency calls to their network automatically and mandated that emergency service personnel be able to receive the originating cell phone’s telephone number and the location of the cell site that handled that call. Since this provision, however, progress in increasing the ability to accurately locate a mobile phone user in the context of an emergency has been slow.

One process that allows providers to determine a user’s place in space is called triangulation, wherein the wireless device (e.g., smartphone) sends signals to other cell towers in addition to the primary one, which allows three antennas to triangulate the point of origin. This process has doubtlessly saved countless lives in allowing emergency personnel to respond to distress calls more quickly. With the advent of smart and now even smarter phones with location services, some are suggesting that the phone’s capabilities can be better utilized, rather than only relying on cell signals. Admiral David Simpson, former chief of the FCC’s Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau spoke to this issue by stating, “If you can hail a ride using that part of the phone or order a pizza, of course, we should be able to use that for something as worthy as micro-targeting alerts.”

One challenge of using WEA is its current limitation on the granular targeting of alerts, which according to one Harris County Official is why his local government did not use the system during Hurricane Harvey, "because it does not want to potentially alert the entire county when a WEA message may only pertain to a certain portion of the county.” As natural disasters increase in strength and frequency, consideration must be given to technologies’ potential to assist in emergency response, recovery, and relief efforts. According to Wired, FCC Chairman Ajit Pai stated that the agency would begin implementation of Obama-era orders "calling for wireless carriers to pinpoint emergency alerts down to the cellular tower level.” Other proposed rules include provisions to require carriers to send alerts in multiple languages and be able to support multimedia alerts. With the recently demonstrated public need for enhanced wireless emergency alerts, the country would be well served if local, state, and federal governments prioritized addressing barriers to use by local authorities. Source: Issie Lapowsky, Wired

#### Additional Information:

[Inside the Decades-Long Fight for Better Emergency Alerts](https://www.wired.com/story/better-emergency-alerts-fcc/)

[<https://www.wired.com/story/better-emergency-alerts-fcc/>]

**FCC Stands Strong on WEA Enhancement Compliance Deadlines**

November 1, 2017 – The FCC released an Order on Reconsideration in the Matter of Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) [PS Docket No. 15-91], denying CTIA’s and the Competitive Carriers Association's (CCA) separate petitions to defer compliance deadlines for embedded references and the more granular geo-targeting requirement. CTIA contended that more time was needed to test the feasibility of embedded references (i.e., URLs) in WEA messages and assess the consequences of same on network congestion. CCA requested relief for non-nationwide providers as they have constrained resources to develop the technology to support URLs in WEA messages. The FCC response was to “waive the November 1, 2017, deadline for all Participating CMS Providers except for AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, Sprint and U.S. Cellular, until publication of this Order in the Federal Register.” Their decision took into consideration the need to maintain regional carrier participation in WEA and to “dissuade CCA members from withdrawing from WEA participation because they cannot comply with the embedded references requirement.” Regarding the geotargeting requirement, however, the Order stated that “we find no basis for granting relief.” Therefore, the “best approximates” geo-targeting compliance deadline remained November 1, 2017, for all participating providers.

#### Additional Information:

Order on Reconsideration: [Docx](https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-17-143A1.docx) - [Pdf](https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-17-143A1.pdf) - [Txt](https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-17-143A1.txt)

[<https://www.fcc.gov/document/wireless-emergency-alert-rules-reaffirmed-nationwide-carriers>]

Wireless RERC Updates

**Take and Share the Survey of User Needs**

The Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center for Wireless Inclusive Technologies (Wireless RERC) announces the launch of its updated Survey of User Needs (SUN). The SUN is the Wireless RERC's cornerstone survey on wireless technology use by people with disabilities. It has been completed by over 7,500 consumers with disabilities since it was first launched in 2001.

This latest version represents the 6th version of the survey, which is updated periodically in response to changes in technology. In addition to questions about cell phone and tablet use, this latest version of the SUN collects information about wearables, "smart" home technologies, and other next-generation wirelessly connected devices. User responses will help designers and engineers make new wireless devices and services for people with disabilities. Data from the SUN also provides important information to the wireless industry, government regulators, and other researchers to help them make wireless technology more accessible and more useful to people with all types of disabilities.

If you have a disability and have not already taken it, please consider taking this survey. If you know someone who has a disability, please forward the survey to them.

[Take the Survey](http://b.gatech.edu/2yvCHnz) and [Share the Survey](http://www.wirelessrerc.gatech.edu/wireless-rerc-launches-latest-survey-user-needs)

#### Additional Information:

[Take the Survey](http://b.gatech.edu/2yvCHnz)

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[Share the Survey](http://www.wirelessrerc.gatech.edu/wireless-rerc-launches-latest-survey-user-needs)

[http://www.wirelessrerc.gatech.edu/wireless-rerc-launches-latest-survey-user-needs]

Other Items of Interest

**Spire Announces Health Tag, a Wearable for Health Monitoring**

November 16, 2017 - Spire, a San Francisco based startup, has revealed its latest wearable the *Health Tag*, reportedly their smallest and most versatile sensor yet. The Spire Health Tag is approximately the size of a thumb and is intended to be attached to pieces of clothing to monitor breathing, heart rate, and sleep quality. Each sensor has a battery life of approximately one year and is water (and washing machine) proof. Sold in packs of three, eight or fifteen, the Health Tags are meant to be left in place, not put on and taken off. The tags can then wirelessly connect to a smartphone app so users can monitor their biodata. Users can select outcomes such as sleeping better, staying more active, or reducing tension. Based on their data, the app will suggest exercise or breathing routines.

The designers behind Health Tag wanted users not to fidget with their device, rather, they wanted a wearable that could be attached to various pieces of clothing such as day and sleepwear and working together, help users monitor, track, and initiate activities that would impact their day to day health. Spire CEO Jonathan Palley wrote, “To bring the (wearable) industry forward we had to make the wearable disappear.” The more someone uses their Health Tag, on their work out clothes, their work clothes, and even pajamas, the more data will be available to them to make informed decisions about their health. When designing the notifications, Palley said that their aim was not to be intrusive, "If you're having a healthy day, we shouldn't be bugging you.” Unlike fitness trackers with a focus on exercise, Spire’s product is for all ages and activity levels. Spire hopes that Health Tag’s flexibility and discrete design will appeal to all users with an interest in improved health monitoring. Because the smartphone app is the user interface, if the app is accessible, this wearable health system could have utility for people with disabilities. Other wearables, like smart watches, may have accessibility barriers by nature of the form factor. Such as displays that are too small for some people with low vision or tiny buttons that are difficult to access for those with dexterity disabilities. The fidget-free Spire system avoids these design barriers. Source: Caroline Cakebread, Business Insider

#### Additional Information:

[A San Francisco startup is offering a health and fitness wearable for people who forget to charge theirs or put](http://www.businessinsider.com/the-spire-health-tag-is-a-wearable-that-you-dont-have-to-put-on-2017-11)

[<http://www.businessinsider.com/the-spire-health-tag-is-a-wearable-that-you-dont-have-to-put-on-2017-11>]

**Exoskeleton Assists Children with Cerebral Palsy Walk More Easily**

November 16, 2017 - A team of researchers from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Clinical Center revealed an exoskeleton prototype that assists children with cerebral palsy (CP) walk more easily. Cerebral palsy affects mobility and is the most common childhood movement disorder. Half of the children with CP become unable to walk by the time they reach adulthood. There is currently no cure for CP, though patients have seen improved motor skills with supportive therapies, medication, and surgery. The team hopes that their less invasive and high-tech solution will empower children with mobility difficulties. The team published an article on their technology in Science Translational Medicine this past August. Thomas Bulea, staff scientist in the Center's Rehabilitation Medicine Department and lead author of the study, wrote, “Most of the children were pretty excited to feel the way that this device changed how they walked, more striking was the reaction we saw on a lot of the parents' faces. Several, if not most of them, expressed surprise at the visible effects of the exoskeleton during walking."

Their study included children with cerebral palsy ages five to nineteen who all experienced difficulties with excessive knee flexion due to crouch gait. Six of the seven children displayed walking improvements with the exoskeleton similar to those seen with orthopedic surgery in a period of eight to twelve weeks. Diane Damiano, chief of the Functional and Applied Biomechanics section in the NIH Clinical Center's Rehabilitation Medicine Department and a co-author of the study wrote, “Our exoskeleton provides assistance to improve upright posture when worn while still requiring the person to control their own muscles and stability. Children with cerebral palsy have a physical disability that persists their entire life, so they need to be continuously monitoring and working to maintain their motor functioning as part of their everyday lives. Wearable devices could provide a novel mechanism to do this."

The team hopes to continue their research and test the exoskeleton on more children with mobility impairments. There also remain questions about the prolonged use of the device, such as the device accommodating the growth of the child.  About this future research, Bulea wrote, “The big question that we're looking to answer going forward is, how do these improvements in walking and muscle activity that we see with the exoskeleton affect their walking in the long term? How does it, or does it, change their walking pattern when they're not using the exoskeleton? And that's a question that is still very much open. We're still a long way off from this being a commercially available product. We're excited by the promise that this initial study showed, but we still have to do more studies to establish the effectiveness of this as a rehabilitation device.”

Steven Collins, Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Stanford University commented on this study, saying, "In the future, I expect we will see more and more exoskeletons like this used in children's medicine. Exoskeletons are versatile and controllable, so they can adapt alongside their users. In some cases, this may make them better than surgery." Technology that adapts to its user dynamically is growing as designers and researchers make their devices suited to the diverse needs of their clients. The NIH’s exoskeleton is one of the most recent examples of this trend. Source: Jacqueline Howard, CNN; Lerner and colleagues, Science Translational Medicine

#### Additional Information:

[Robotic suit helps kids with cerebral palsy walk tall](http://www.cnn.com/2017/11/08/health/cerebral-palsy-robotic-exoskeleton-teching/index.html)

[http://www.cnn.com/2017/11/08/health/cerebral-palsy-robotic-exoskeleton-teching/index.html]

[A lower-extremity exoskeleton improves knee extension in children with crouch gait from cerebral palsy](http://stm.sciencemag.org/content/9/404/eaam9145)

[http://stm.sciencemag.org/content/9/404/eaam9145]

**AbleGamers and Train Jam Seek to Host Three Video Game Developers with Disabilities for Video Game and Developer Conferences in 2018**

November 14, 2017 - AbleGamers Foundation, a non-profit organization that works to break down economic and social barriers for people with disabilities through video games, has announced it will renew its partnership with Train Jam to host three game developers with disabilities for the 2018 convention in San Francisco. Participants will then continue to the Game Developers Conference (GDC), the world’s largest annual video game convention for designers. On the train ride down from Chicago to San Francisco, the three participants will have 52 hours to form teams and create a playable video game based on their chosen theme. On this return collaboration, founder of Train Jam, Adriel Wallick said, “We’re so excited to partner with AbleGamers again for Train Jam 2018. We strive to create an environment where developers from all different backgrounds can collaborate to create amazing games, and we're beyond thrilled to be working directly with a charity that can help us achieve our vision. We look forward to supporting the three new developers AbleGamers chooses to join us for the event.”

Steven Spohn, COO, AbleGamers wrote, "AbleGamers is proud to offer support of future game developers with disabilities through the wonderful Train Jam event. Adriel and her team work tirelessly to help the developers of tomorrow of diverse backgrounds break into the industry and bring their ideas to life for everyone to enjoy. “It's so difficult for developers with disabilities to find employment and growth opportunities in the video game industry. Sponsoring three talented, next generation developers with the opportunity to get an extra edge at a bright future is one of our favorite initiatives." Train Jam 2018 begins March 15, 2018, through the week of March 19, 2018. Source: Develop

#### Additional Information:

[AbleGamers Charity and Train Jam Partner to Send Three Developers with Disabilities To a Three Day Video Game Design Event with](https://www.develop-online.net/press-releases/ablegamers-charity-and-train-jam-partner-to-send-three-developers-with-disabilities-to-a-three-day-video-game-design-event-with/0237399)

[<https://www.develop-online.net/press-releases/ablegamers-charity-and-train-jam-partner-to-send-three-developers-with-disabilities-to-a-three-day-video-game-design-event-with/0237399>]

**WearWorks Provides Haptic Feedback for Runners**

November 6, 2017 - Simon Wheatcroft, like most Americans who are blind, was not born blind. He began to lose his vision at age seventeen due to a degenerative eye condition called retinitis pigmentosa. This did not stop him from continuing to pursue his passion for outdoor activities including competitive running. He faced the same issues that many athletes who are blind face, including how to safely and comfortably continue their physical activities in a world built for sighted persons. This is where his partnership with WearWorks, a Brooklyn-based start-up and their running assistant prototype, Wayband, came in. In an interview with The Verge, Wheatcroft said, “As a blind person, you always strive for independence. But it’s a bit of a contradiction because oftentimes, you’re using somebody with sight to become independent. What we’re trying to do is use this technology to really achieve true independence. This race isn’t about time, it’s proving that something is possible.”

The inspiration for Wayband came from the question, how do we make people who are visually impaired more mobile? WearWorks was founded by three graduate students from New York’s Pratt Institute from various disciplines. Keith Kirkland served as the project’s fashion designer and engineer, Yangyang Wang and Kevin Yoo as sculptors and industrial engineers, respectively. The team set out to design a prototype that could provide runners with haptic feedback instead of the more traditional audio cues. The core of the WearWorks technology is fairly simple: athletes pair the device with their phone which utilizes the device’s GPS to map a route. A “virtual fence” is created which buzzes the user every time they step out of it, with additional buzzes for when the user should go right or left. The team aimed to “keep it functional and simple,” says Yoo. “We actually went to the National Federation for the Blind, and they told us high-tech canes, and proximity sensors are great, but what really would help us is wayfinding.” On using the device, Wheatcroft described it as a “safe sandbox,” which features more precise area approximation versus other running assistive devices (2.5-meter corridors versus 10-50 meters).

Wheatcroft has run various marathons and ultramarathons, including the Boston Marathon in 2016, the New York Marathon twice and a route from New York to Boston over nine days. Using devices like WearWorks, he hopes to continue adding to that list. With an increasingly aging population and those with mobility impairments, devices such as WearWorks are an innovative alternative to traditional audio and environmental solutions. The haptic feedback of the device is key to its precision as many athletes that are blind complain of audio overload from existing devices. Source: Patrick Sisson, The Verge

#### Additional Information:

[Beyond the Finish Line: How technology helped a blind athlete run free at the New York Marathon](https://www.theverge.com/2017/11/6/16610728/2017-new-york-marathon-blind-runner-wearworks-wayband-simon-wheatcroft)

[<https://www.theverge.com/2017/11/6/16610728/2017-new-york-marathon-blind-runner-wearworks-wayband-simon-wheatcroft>]

**VR Experience to Simulate what Music Feels like to a Person that is Deaf**

November 5, 2017 - A recent collaboration between Rachel Kolb (born deaf but with a recent cochlear implant now has partial hearing) and the virtual reality (VR) department of *The New York Times* created a VR experience that explores how music might feel to someone with a hearing impairment. Inspired by Rachel’s stories and using her narration of her sensations of experiencing music as an adult for the first time, the team set out to create an inviting and innovative VR experience. James Merry, an animator for the production company Squint/Opera in London, spoke of his process for creating the animations for the VR visuals, “When I work with voice-over, I’m hardly ever able to work out what’s being said from the voice track alone. I can hear when something is being said, but not so much what is being said. So I use a combination of the audio track and the transcript with timestamps. The audio waveform, which I can see on the computer screen, helps me to sync things up.” James uses hearing aids and was inspired by his impairment to use a warm and loose hand-drawn style for the VR animations. In addition to James’ animations, the team utilized Lytro’s camera technology to create a 360-degree, seamless world. Users can navigate the world with the VR headset and experience the hand-drawn animation and high-resolution video with a high degree of freedom. The New York Times’ VR experience is another example of virtual reality that is inclusive of the lived experience of people with disabilities, where their reality is included in the design of the virtual environment. Source: Maureen Towey, New York Times

#### Additional Information:

[How We Used VR to Explore What Music Feels Like to a Deaf Person](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/05/insider/how-we-used-vr-to-explore-what-music-feels-like-to-a-deaf-person.html)

[<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/05/insider/how-we-used-vr-to-explore-what-music-feels-like-to-a-deaf-person.html>]

**GeekWire’s Podcast Host Discusses Accessibility and Universal Design**

November 1, 2017 - In a recent episode of GeekWire’s Health Tech podcast, The Quad Squad, Todd Stabelfedt spoke of promoting accessibility through technology. Stabelfedt is a quadriplegic and is the founder of C4 Database Management. He is well-versed in speaking towards the importance of universal design and accessibility considerations in technology. He sees universal design as the “design and composition of the environment so it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability.” As a father of two children, Stebelfedt works to provide for his family and demonstrate that with proper accommodation, people with disabilities can lead productive and independent lives. He and his wife have also implemented many home automation features so that Todd can control things like the lights and garage doors with his voice.

When asked about his thoughts on how technology and software designers could learn more about implementing accessibility features, Stebelfedt said, “I just think it’s education. It always comes to that, just repeating of that. And using stories that people can associate with. I think that’s how you do it. And if you’re not thinking about accessibility or universal design, then that’s not a bad on you. That’s not your world. That’s not your scene. Like today and like with the Apple conference it was just trying to flip lights on. Trying to show people, no, this is real. This is why we need to do this.” Stebelfedt’s story is one of many demonstrating the potential that technologies, when made accessible, have for users with disabilities to lead healthier, fuller lives. Source: Clare McGrane, GeekWire

#### Additional Information:

[‘The Quadfather’ has a message for techies — accessibility ‘should not be an add-on’](https://www.geekwire.com/2017/health-tech-podcast-quadfather-message-techies-accessibility-not-add/)

[https://www.geekwire.com/2017/health-tech-podcast-quadfather-message-techies-accessibility-not-add/]

Upcoming Events

**2018 Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA) Conference**

The 2018 ATIA Conference will convene January 31 through February 3, 2018 in Orlando, Florida. The ATIA Conference sessions will cover all disabilities and many different types of assistive technology. Session topics will include education, university-level disability services, independent living, workplace accommodations, aging into or with a disability, and current research and development from the field.

#### Additional Information:

[Conference Web Page](https://www.atia.org/conference-attendees/)

[[https://www.atia.org/conference-attendees/]](https://www.atia.org/conference-attendees/%5d)

**2018 CSUN Assistive Technology Conference**

The *33rd CSUN Assistive Technology Conference* (CSUN) will convene March 19 through March 23, 2018 in San Diego, California. CSUN is the largest international conference addressing topics regarding people with disabilities and assistive and accessible technologies. Conference topics typically pertain to the domains of education, employment and workplace, entertainment, independent living, law and policy, and transportation.

#### Additional Information:

[Conference Web Page](http://www.csun.edu/cod/conference)

[<http://www.csun.edu/cod/conference>]

**Technology and Disability Policy Highlights,** November 2017

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The Technology and Disability Policy Highlights (TDPH) is a monthly newsletter that reports on national public policy events and tracks emerging issues of interest to individuals with disabilities, researchers, policymakers, industry, and advocacy professionals. The Wireless RERC is a research center that promotes universal access to wireless technologies and explores their innovative applications in addressing the needs of people with disabilities. For more information on the Wireless RERC, please visit our website at [<http://www.wirelessrerc.org>]. For further information on items summarized in this report, or if you have items of interest that you would like included in future editions, please contact this edition’s editors Salimah LaForce [[salimah@cacp.gatech.edu](file:///C:\Users\salimah\OneDrive%20-%20Georgia%20Institute%20of%20Technology\wiRERC_2016%20-%202021\TDPH\April%202017\salimah@cacp.gatech.edu)] and Kenneth Goughnour [[kenneth@cacp.gatech.edu](mailto:kenneth@cacp.gatech.edu)].

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