

EVALUATING FIRSTNET: PERFORMANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND REAUTHORIZATION

HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY OF THE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

FEBRUARY 4, 2026

Serial No. 119–59



Published for the use of the Committee on Energy and Commerce
govinfo.gov/committee/house-energy
energycommerce.house.gov

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

63–895 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2026

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE

BRETT GUTHRIE, Kentucky
Chairman

ROBERT E. LATTA, Ohio	FRANK PALLONE, JR., New Jersey
H. MORGAN GRIFFITH, Virginia	<i>Ranking Member</i>
GUS M. BILIRAKIS, Florida	DIANA DeGETTE, Colorado
RICHARD HUDSON, North Carolina	JAN SCHAKOWSKY, Illinois
EARL L. "BUDDY" CARTER, Georgia	DORIS O. MATSUI, California
GARY J. PALMER, Alabama	KATHY CASTOR, Florida
NEAL P. DUNN, Florida, <i>Vice Chairman</i>	PAUL TONKO, New York
DAN CRENSHAW, Texas	YVETTE D. CLARKE, New York
JOHN JOYCE, Pennsylvania	RAUL RUIZ, California
RANDY K. WEBER, SR., TEXAS	SCOTT H. PETERS, California
RICK W. ALLEN, Georgia	DEBBIE DINGELL, Michigan
TROY BALDERSON, Ohio	MARC A. VEASEY, Texas
RUSS FULCHER, Idaho	ROBIN L. KELLY, Illinois
AUGUST PFLUGER, Texas	NANETTE DIAZ BARRAGÁN, California
DIANA HARSHBARGER, Tennessee	DARREN SOTO, Florida
MARIANNETTE MILLER-MEEKS, Iowa	KIM SCHRIER, Washington
KAT CAMMACK, Florida	LORI TRAHAN, Massachusetts
JAY OBERNOLTE, California	LIZZIE FLETCHER, Texas
JOHN JAMES, Michigan	ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ, New York
CLIFF BENTZ, Oregon	JAKE AUCHINCLOSS, Massachusetts
ERIN HOUCHIN, Indiana	TROY A. CARTER, Louisiana
RUSSELL FRY, South Carolina	ROBERT MENENDEZ, New Jersey
LAUREL M. LEE, Florida	KEVIN MULLIN, California
NICHOLAS A. LANGWORTHY, New York	GREG LANDSMAN, Ohio
THOMAS H. KEAN, JR., New Jersey	JENNIFER L. McCLELLAN, Virginia
MICHAEL A. RULLI, Ohio	
GABE EVANS, Colorado	
CRAIG A. GOLDMAN, Texas	
JULIE FEDORCHAK, North Dakota	

PROFESSIONAL STAFF

MEGAN JACKSON, *Staff Director*
SOPHIE KHANAHMADI, *Deputy Staff Director*
TIFFANY GUARASCIO, *Minority Staff Director*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY

RICHARD HUDSON, North Carolina
Chairman

RICK W. ALLEN, Georgia, <i>Vice Chairman</i>	DORIS O. MATSUI, California <i>Ranking Member</i>
ROBERT E. LATTA, Ohio	DARREN SOTO, Florida
H. MORGAN GRIFFITH, Virginia	YVETTE D. CLARKE, New York
GUS M. BILIRAKIS, Florida	RAUL RUIZ, California
EARL L. "BUDDY" CARTER, Georgia	SCOTT H. PETERS, California
NEAL P. DUNN, Florida	DEBBIE DINGELL, Michigan
RUSS FULCHER, Idaho	ROBIN L. KELLY, Illinois
AUGUST PFLUGER, Texas	NANETTE DIAZ BARRAGÁN, California
KAT CAMMACK, Florida	TROY A. CARTER, Louisiana
JAY OBERNOLTE, California	ROBERT MENENDEZ, New Jersey
ERIN HOUCHIN, Indiana	GREG LANDSMAN, Ohio
RUSSELL FRY, South Carolina	JENNIFER L. McCLELLAN, Virginia
THOMAS H. KEAN, JR., New Jersey	KATHY CASTOR, Florida
CRAIG A. GOLDMAN, Texas	FRANK PALLONE, JR., New Jersey (<i>ex officio</i>)
JULIE FEDORCHAK, North Dakota	
BRETT GUTHRIE, Kentucky (<i>ex officio</i>)	

C O N T E N T S

	Page
Hon. Richard Hudson, a Representative in Congress from the State of North Carolina, opening statement	2
Prepared statement	4
Hon. Doris O. Matsui, a Representative in Congress from the State of California, opening statement	9
Prepared statement	11
Hon. Brett Guthrie, a Representative in Congress from the Commonwealth of Kentucky, opening statement	13
Prepared statement	14
Hon. Frank Pallone, Jr., a Representative in Congress from the State of New Jersey, opening statement	17
Prepared statement	19
Hon. Jennifer L. McClellan, a Representative in Congress from the Commonwealth of Virginia, opening statement	22
WITNESSES	
Michael A. Adkinson, Jr., Acting Board Chair, First Responder Network Authority, and Sheriff, Walton County, Florida	23
Prepared statement	26
Answers to submitted questions	140
Michael E. Dame, Associate Administrator for Public Safety Communications, National Telecommunications and Information Administration	32
Prepared statement	34
Scott Agnew, President, FirstNet and Public Sector Mobility, AT&T, Inc.	38
Prepared statement	40
LEGISLATION	
H.R. _____, the First Responder Network Authority Reauthorization Act of 2026	100
SUBMITTED MATERIAL	
<i>Inclusion of the following was approved by unanimous consent.</i>	
List of documents submitted for the record	114
Letter of January 21, 2026, from Jeff Norman, President, Major Cities Chiefs Association, and Sheriff Chris West, President, National Sheriffs' Association, to Mr. Guthrie and Mr. Pallone	115
Letter of January 28, 2026, from Anthony J. Constantini, Policy Analyst, Bull Moose Project, to Mr. Hudson	117
Statement of Thomas A. Schatz, President, Council for Citizens Against Government Waste, February 4, 2026	119
Letter of February 2, 2026, from Andrew Knapp, Director, Hamilton County Emergency Communications, to Subcommittee on Communications And Technology	121
Letter of January 21, 2026, from Christine E. Hamp, President, National Grange	122
Letter of February 2, 2026, from Fire Chief Steven Locke, First Vice President, International Association of Fire Chiefs, to Mr. Guthrie and Mr. Pallone	125
Letter of February 3, 2026, from Patrick Yoes, National President, National Fraternal Order of Police, to Mr. Guthrie and Mr. Pallone	126
Letter of January 16, 2026, from Frank J. Walters, President, New Jersey State Fire Chiefs Association, to Mr. Guthrie and Mr. Hudson	129

VI

	Page
Statement of APCO International, et al., "Recommendations for Preserving the Federal FirstNet Network"	131
Letter of February 3, 2026, from David Williams, President, Taxpayers Protection Alliance, to Mr. Hudson and Ms. Matsui	135
Letter of February 3, 2026, from John Paul Jones, Executive Director,, Public Safety Broadband Technology Association, to Mr. Guthrie and Mr. Hudson .	137
Statement by Lee H. Davidson, Chief Deputy, Ripley County Sheriff's Office ..	139

EVALUATING FIRSTNET: PERFORMANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND REAUTHORIZATION

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2026

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY,
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:16 a.m., in the John D. Dingell Room 2123, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Richard Hudson (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Members present: Hudson, Allen, Latta, Griffith, Bilirakis, Carter of Georgia, Dunn, Pfluger, Cammack, Obernolte, Houchin, Fry, Kean, Goldman, Fedorchak, Guthrie (ex officio), Matsui (subcommittee ranking member), Soto, Clarke, Ruiz, Peters, Dingell, Barragán, Carter of Louisiana, Menendez, Landsman, McClellan, Castor, and Pallone (ex officio).

Also present: Representative Joyce.

Staff present: Jessica Donlon, General Counsel; Michael Essington, Chief Counsel, Communications and Technology; Sydney Greene, Director of Finance and Logistics; Megan Jackson, Staff Director; Noah Jackson, Clerk, Communications and Technology; Sophie Khanahmadi, Deputy Staff Director; John Lin, Senior Counsel, Communications and Technology; Sarah Meier, Counsel and Parliamentarian; Elaina Murphy, Professional Staff Member, Communications and Technology; Brice Ogle, Special Assistant; Seth Ricketts, Clerk, Energy and Environment; Dylan Rogers, Professional Staff Member, Communications and Technology; Chris Sarley, Member Services/Stakeholder Director; Matt VanHyfte, Communications Director; Jane Vickers, Press Assistant; Hannah Anton, Minority Policy Analyst; Keegan Cardman, Minority Staff Assistant; Parul Desai, Minority Chief Counsel, Communications and Technology; Ava Digre, Minority Intern; Waverly Gordon, Minority Deputy Staff Director and General Counsel; Tiffany Guarascio, Minority Staff Director; Jackson Hall, Minority Intern; Dan Miller, Minority Professional Staff Member; Andrew Souvall, Minority Director of Communications, Outreach, and Member Services; Johanna Thomas, Minority Counsel; and Hannah Treger, Minority Staff Assistant.

Mr. HUDSON. The subcommittee will come to order.

The Chair recognizes himself for an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICHARD HUDSON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

Good morning. Welcome to today's legislative hearing on the First Responder Network Authority, or FirstNet.

FirstNet's authorization expires at the beginning of next year, and it is this committee's duty to reauthorize the program before it expires. In the process, we should examine FirstNet's activity since its creation 15 years ago and make any changes necessary to improve its performance.

The future of public safety relies on safe resources like FirstNet, so thank you all for joining us to ensure that our country is taken care of in times of need.

During the horrific terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, first responders from different agencies found they could not communicate with each other because they used different radio systems and overloaded networks prevented communications from going through.

In the aftermath of these attacks, Congress stood up the 9/11 Commission, which made recommendations to prepare for and guard against future attacks. One of those recommendations led to Congress establishing FirstNet, a nationwide broadband network specifically built for public safety.

FirstNet was allocated 20 megahertz of spectrum and \$7 billion to build out the network in all 50 States and the Territories. In 2017, AT&T was selected to deploy the network. Shortly after, FirstNet began providing priority and preemption. During a crisis, when there is increased network traffic, non-FirstNet AT&T subscribers will be removed from the priority list to ensure first responders can always make the call. On December 20, 2023, the FirstNet Authority verified the initial nationwide build-out of the network.

However, the successful build-out of this network does not mean it has not faced challenges. Since 2014, the Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General has issued 21 reports regarding significant concerns about FirstNet and the deployment of the nationwide public safety broadband network, its operational response, and other administrative matters.

Several of these reports highlight contract oversight shortcomings, resulting in modified build-out objectives that jeopardize first responders' ability to do their job. Other reports indicate a failure of the network to adequately respond to a natural disaster, and that a senior official at FirstNet interfered with the OIG's investigation and even retaliated against whistleblowers who cooperated with the OIG.

This committee's work over the last several months has also identified a consistent and troubling finding: The ambiguous language regarding FirstNet's independence while simultaneously placing it directly within an executive branch agency has created confusion and strife for all parties involved when trying to manage this program. To ensure the long-term success of FirstNet, it is imperative there is clear and consistent leadership. This leadership must be able to work hand in hand with the FirstNet Board, not against it.

I would like to emphasize that this draft legislation does not in any way remove the statutory requirement to have a board or their responsibilities to the First Responder Network Authority. The board is an incredibly valuable component of FirstNet and crucial for ensuring the experience and needs of first responders as well as the general public, not government bureaucrats, are reflected in the direction of the network.

Additionally, we must ensure this network can evolve along with the technological landscape. Networks of 15 years ago are different than those of today and could be even more different 15 years from now. For the benefit of first responders, FirstNet should have the statutory flexibility to incorporate new network technologies to provide the most advanced service that public safety requires.

I want to be clear, FirstNet has succeeded despite the challenges it has faced, and I would like to commend AT&T for building a nationwide safety communications network, making it a success and continuing to build it out and improve for the safety of others, and for being the only one to take it on in the first place.

Congress is here to evaluate this program to ensure its long-term success for our first responders. Today is the first step in the reauthorization of this program.

With FirstNet's statutory authority set to expire in 2027, it is time for Congress to assess FirstNet's progress and ensure that we provide a governing structure that sets up FirstNet to succeed into the future.

Today, we will hear from our witnesses who are directly involved with FirstNet about the current state of the network and how the legislation before us will strengthen the First Responder Network Authority.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hudson follows:]

Opening Statement for Chairman Richard Hudson
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization.”
Wednesday, February 4, 2026, at 10:15 AM

Introduction

Good morning, and welcome to today’s legislative hearing on the First Responder Network Authority, or FirstNet. FirstNet’s authorization expires at the beginning of next year, and it is this Committee’s duty to reauthorize the program before it expires. In the process, we should examine FirstNet’s activities since its creation 15 years ago and make any changes necessary to improve its performance. The future of public safety relies on safe resources like FirstNet, so thank you all for joining us to ensure our country is taken care of in times of need.

During the horrific terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, first responders from different agencies found they could not communicate with each other because they used different radio systems, and overloaded networks prevented communications from going through. In the aftermath of these attacks, Congress stood up the 9/11 Commission,

which made recommendations to prepare for and guard against future attacks. One of those recommendations led to Congress establishing FirstNet, a nationwide broadband network specifically built for public safety.

FirstNet was allocated 20 megahertz of spectrum and \$7 billion to build out the network in all 50 states and the territories. In 2017, AT&T was selected to deploy this network. Shortly after, FirstNet began providing priority and preemption. During a crisis when there is increased network traffic, non-FirstNet AT&T subscribers will be removed from the priority line to ensure first responders can always make the call. On December 20, 2023, the FirstNet Authority verified the initial nationwide buildout of the network.

However, the successful buildout of this network does not mean it has not faced challenges. Since 2014, the Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General (OIG) has issued 21 reports regarding significant concerns about FirstNet and the deployment of the nationwide public safety broadband network, its operational responses, and other administrative matters.

Several of these reports highlight contract oversight shortcomings, resulting in modified buildout objectives that jeopardize first responders' ability to do their jobs. Other reports indicate a failure of the network to adequately respond to a natural disaster, and that a senior official at FirstNet interfered with the OIG's investigations and retaliated against whistleblowers who cooperated with the OIG.

This Committee's work over the last several months has also identified a consistent and troubling finding: the ambiguous language regarding FirstNet's independence—while simultaneously placing it directly within an Executive Branch agency—has created confusion and strife for all parties involved when trying to manage this program. To ensure the long-term success of FirstNet, it is imperative there is clear and consistent leadership.

This leadership must be able to work hand-in-hand with the FirstNet board, not against it. I would like to emphasize that this draft legislation does not, in any way, remove the statutory requirement to have a Board, or their responsibilities to the First Responder Network Authority. The Board is a valuable component of FirstNet and crucial for

ensuring the experience and needs of first responders and the general public, not government bureaucracy, are reflected in the direction of the network.

Additionally, we must ensure that this network can evolve along with the technological landscape. Networks of 15 years ago are different than those of today and could be even more different 15 years from now. For the benefit of first responders, FirstNet should have the statutory flexibility to incorporate new network technologies to provide the most advanced service that public safety requires.

Conclusion

I want to be clear, FirstNet has succeeded despite the challenges it's faced, and I would like to commend AT&T for building a nationwide safety communications network, making it a success and continuing to build it out and improve for the safety of others, and being the only ones to take it on. Congress is here to evaluate this program to ensure its long-term success for our first responders. Today is the first step to reauthorize the program.

With FirstNet's statutory authority set to expire in 2027, it's time for Congress to assess FirstNet's progress and ensure that we provide a governing structure that sets up FirstNet to succeed in the future.

Today, we will hear from our witnesses who are directly involved with FirstNet about the current state the network, and how the legislation before us will strengthen the First Responder Network Authority.

I now yield five minutes to my colleague, Ranking Member Matsui, for her opening statement.

Mr. HUDSON. I now recognize the ranking member, the gentlelady from California, for her opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. DORIS O. MATSUI, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Ms. MATSUI. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Keeping the public safe is one of our most fundamental responsibilities as lawmakers. In moments of crisis, people expect help to arrive quickly, but our public safety professionals can't do their jobs if they don't receive the call for help or if the lines of communication fail. That is why Congress created the FirstNet Authority, a nationwide broadband network specifically for first responders.

Disasters don't wait for perfect conditions. Wildfires, floods, severe storms, and large-scale emergencies can overwhelm local systems in seconds. In those moments, our first responders need priority service, strong coverage, and a network that holds up under pressure.

Back home in California, we are hearing that FirstNet is making a difference on the ground. Cal OES, our State emergency management office, has highlighted the tremendous value they have seen from FirstNet, but they also emphasize the job is not finished.

Even with the progress so far, too many communities in rural California still can't count on reliable coverage. That matters because one of the core goals of FirstNet was to extend reliable service to the places the market too often leaves behind.

As we consider reauthorization, we should be asking how we strengthen incentives and accountability so that build-out reaches the hard places, not just the easy ones. At the same time, it is important to recognize what this program has accomplished.

FirstNet is a strong example of what can happen when Congress identifies a real need and builds a durable framework to meet it. At first, some questioned whether a nationwide public safety network was feasible. Some questioned whether it was good business. But Congress took on that challenge because public safety is too important for us just to stand by.

Since then, FirstNet has spurred modern public safety connectivity. It showed that serving first responders can be both a public good and a sustainable business model.

Our job today is to take the lessons of nearly 15 years and make FirstNet even better. That starts with fixing its shortcomings, especially in transparency and accountability. Congress and the public need clear visibility into FirstNet's performance, spending, and whether commitments are being met.

We also have a responsibility to help the system evolve. Public safety needs are not one size fits all. Some public safety agencies in my district rely on FirstNet, some use other providers, and some use a mix because they can't afford a single point of failure. But no matter what network a responder is on, they should be able to connect instantly with partners on the ground, even when conditions are at their worst. We should look for ways to enable innovation, spur competition, and meet local needs while maintaining interoperability and reliability nationwide.

At the end of the day, this reauthorization is about listening to our first responders and making sure they have the tools they need and do their job safely and effectively. If we get this right, we can build on what is already working, fix what isn't, and ensure FirstNet keeps delivering for communities big and small, urban and rural for decades to come.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on how this draft bill balances these priorities and what changes are needed.

Thank you, and I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Matsui follows:]

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Ranking Member Doris Matsui**

Hearing on “Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization”

February 4, 2026

Thank you, Chairman Hudson.

Keeping the public safe is one of our most fundamental responsibilities as lawmakers. In moments of crisis, people expect help to arrive quickly. But our public safety professionals can’t do their jobs if they don’t receive the call for help, or if their lines of communication fail.

That’s why Congress created the FirstNet Authority, a nationwide broadband network specifically for first responders.

Disasters don’t wait for perfect conditions. Wildfires, floods, severe storms, and large scale emergencies can overwhelm local systems in seconds. In those moments, our first responders need priority service, strong coverage, and a network that holds up under pressure.

Back home in California, we’re hearing that FirstNet is making a difference on the ground. Cal O-E-S, our state emergency management office, has highlighted the tremendous value they’ve seen from FirstNet. But they’ve also emphasized the job isn’t finished.

Even with the progress so far, too many communities in rural California still can’t count on reliable coverage. That matters because one of the core goals of FirstNet was to extend reliable service to the places the market too often leaves behind.

As we consider reauthorization, we should be asking how we strengthen incentives and accountability so that buildout reaches the hard places, not just the easy ones. At the same time, it’s important to recognize what this program has accomplished.

FirstNet is a strong example of what can happen when Congress identifies a real need and builds a durable framework to meet it.

At first, some questioned whether a nationwide public safety network was feasible. Some questioned whether it was good business. But Congress took on that challenge because public safety is too important for us to stand by. Since then, FirstNet has spurred modern public safety connectivity. It showed that serving first responders can be both a public good and a sustainable business model.

Our job today is to take the lessons of nearly fifteen years and make FirstNet even better. That starts with fixing its shortcomings, especially in transparency and accountability.

February 4, 2026
Page 2

Congress and the public need clear visibility into FirstNet's performance, spending, and whether commitments are being met. We also have a responsibility to help the system evolve. Public safety needs are not one-size-fits-all.

Some public safety agencies in my district rely on FirstNet, some use other providers, and some use a mix—because they can't afford a single point of failure. But no matter what network a responder is on, they should be able to connect instantly with partners on the ground, even when conditions are at their worst.

We should look for ways to enable innovation, spur competition, and meet local needs, while maintaining inter-operability and reliability nationwide.

At the end of the day, this reauthorization is about listening to our first responders and making sure they have the tools they need to do their jobs safely and effectively. If we get this right, we can build on what's already working, fix what isn't, and ensure FirstNet keeps delivering for communities... big and small... urban and rural, for decades to come.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how this draft bill balances these priorities and what changes are needed.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

I now recognize the chairman of the full committee, the gentleman from Kentucky, for 5 minutes for his opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BRETT GUTHRIE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY

Mr. GUTHRIE. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman Hudson. Thanks for bringing us all together on this important work, and thanks for the Ranking Member Matsui for working on this as well. I look forward to hearing more about FirstNet Responder Network Authority and the impact the legislation before us will have.

It has been almost 15 years since Congress created the First Responder Network Authority. Born in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, this network is critical for first responders to have a communications network that works and when they need it most.

It is important that this committee evaluates the progress FirstNet has made since its inception and make necessary changes to improve it. The committee's oversight work on this issue has indicated ongoing challenges with the FirstNet structure, and the Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General has indicated problems with transparency and accountability.

The legislation before us today makes those reforms to improve transparency, accountability, and leadership but also to ensure longevity and continued development and success of this network as technology evolves. This bill keeps important aspects of FirstNet, such as the board, which provides valuable expertise of this network to ensure continued success of the program.

Last year, I had the opportunity to meet with the Fern Creek fire chief and other local first responders in my district to talk about FirstNet operations and disaster preparedness. We talked about reliable access to communications for our first responders in our communities, especially during emergencies like the devastating tornados and floods that struck the Commonwealth in recent years.

The creation of the First Responder Network Authority led the way in innovation for a dedicated communication service for first responders where today there are now competing services for first responder communications. This healthy competition will drive further market innovation to provide the best services dedicated to public safety.

However, we must ensure the different users of these services can communicate and are interoperable with each other. Regardless of which service provider our first responders use, it is critical that their communication tools work reliably in the moments of the greatest need.

Thank you again for having this, Chairman Hudson. Thanks for all our witnesses for being here. We look forward to hearing from you. Your participation is important.

And I will yield back.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Guthrie follows:]

Opening Statement of Chairman Brett Guthrie
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization.”
Wednesday, February 4, 2026, at 10:15 AM

Thank you, Chairman Hudson, for bringing us together for this important hearing and thank you to the witnesses for your participation. I look forward to hearing more about the First Responder Network Authority and the impact that the legislation before us will have.

It has been almost 15 years since Congress created the First Responder Network Authority. Born in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, this network is critical for first responders to have a communications network that works when they most need it.

It is important that this Committee evaluates the progress FirstNet has made since its inception and make necessary changes to improve it. The Committee’s oversight work on this issue has indicated ongoing challenges with the FirstNet structure, and the Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General has indicated problems with transparency and accountability.

The legislation before us makes those reforms to improve transparency, accountability, and leadership, but also to ensure the longevity and continued development—and success—of this network as technology evolves. This bill keeps important aspects of FirstNet, such as the Board which provides valuable expertise to this network to ensure continued success of the program.

Last year, I had the opportunity to meet with the Fern Creek Fire Chief and other local first responders in my district to talk about FirstNet operations and disaster preparedness. We talked about reliable access to communications for our first responders and our communities, especially during emergencies like the devastating tornadoes and floods that struck the Commonwealth in recent years.

The creation of the First Responder Network Authority led the way in innovation for a dedicated communication service for first responders, where today there are now competing services for first responder communications. This healthy competition will drive further market innovation to provide the best services dedicated to public safety.

However, we must ensure that different users of these services can communicate and are interoperable with each other. Regardless of which service provider first responders use, it is critical that their communications tools work reliably in the moments of greatest need.

Thank you again to the witnesses for your participation and I look forward to hearing from you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentleman from New Jersey, the ranking member, for 5 minutes for his opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. FRANK PALLONE, JR., A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY

Mr. PALLONE. Thank you, Chairman Hudson.

The subcommittee has worked hard in recent months to advance bipartisan efforts to improve public safety communications, and I am glad to see that we are continuing today as we discuss legislation to reauthorize the First Responder Network Authority.

Since its creation following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, FirstNet has delivered unprecedented connectivity to law enforcement, fire services, emergency medical services, and many other public safety personnel who serve our communities every day. And prior to those attacks, the market for priority and preemptive services for first responders did not really exist.

The Government Emergency Telecommunication Service, or GETS, has been around for some time, and more recently the nationwide Wireless Priority Service, or WPS. Yet nothing comes close to the mobile capabilities and exclusivity that are available to first responders today and offered by three different nationwide providers who compete fiercely for public safety's business.

Now, some of my colleagues might not want to believe it, but government intervention and investment by Congress in 2012 actually opened the door to more competition while raising the bar for public safety communication services. And as we look to reauthorize First Responder Network Authority, it is important that we recognize that many of the conditions that existed when it was created in 2012 have changed significantly in 14 years.

We also have the benefit of examination and analysis from the Commerce Department's Office of Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office. They both identified issues that have led FirstNet to fall short of its mission at times to serve first responders, and some of those problems are structural while others have been addressed on an ongoing basis by the FirstNet Authority as they have arisen.

In any case, the text in the discussion draft before us today represents a good-faith effort to address concerns that have been raised with the committee over the years.

It is also clear that the FirstNet service remains overwhelmingly popular with the vast majority of public safety organizations. Ultimately, the user experience and functionality from the perspective of first responders and public safety subscribers is the most important metric for us to consider, and I am committed to ensuring that we do no harm to this service in the course of this effort.

I am aware of the passion and interest this issue has across a broad range of stakeholders. I have appreciated hearing the perspectives of our friends in public safety, representatives of Federal, State, and local governments, and wireless industry stakeholders who offer these services, and I look forward to continuing those conversations this year as we work through the regular order proc-

ess to achieve consensus that can pass both the House and Senate and be signed into law by the year's end.

So let me thank Representatives McClellan and Dunn for their leadership in this effort that is absolutely critical to keeping first responders connected when it matters most.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Pallone follows:]

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.**

Hearing on “Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization”

February 4, 2026

The Subcommittee has worked hard in recent months to advance bipartisan efforts to improve public safety communications. And I am glad to see that work continuing today as we discuss legislation to reauthorize the First Responder Network Authority.

Since its creation following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, FirstNet has delivered unprecedented connectivity to law enforcement, fire services, emergency medical services, and many other public safety personnel who serve our communities every day.

Prior to those attacks, the market for priority and preemptive services for first responders did not really exist. The Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS) has been around for some time and, more recently, the nationwide Wireless Priority Service (WPS). Yet nothing comes close to the mobile capabilities and exclusivity that are available to first responders today and offered by three different nationwide providers who compete fiercely for public safety’s business. Some of my colleagues might not want to believe it, but government intervention and investment by Congress in 2012 actually opened the door to more competition while raising the bar for public safety communications services.

As we look to reauthorize First Responder Network Authority, it’s important that we recognize that many of the conditions that existed when it was created in 2012 have changed significantly in 14 years. We also have the benefit of examination and analysis from the Commerce Department’s Office of Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office. They have both identified issues that have led FirstNet to fall short of its mission at times to serve first responders. Some of those problems are structural while others have been addressed on an ongoing basis by the FirstNet Authority as they’ve arisen. In any case, the text in the discussion draft before us today represents a good faith effort to address concerns that have been raised with the Committee over the years.

It is also clear that the FirstNet service remains overwhelmingly popular with the vast majority of public safety organizations. Ultimately, the user experience and functionality from the perspective of first responders and public safety subscribers is the most important metric for us to consider. I am committed to ensuring that we do no harm to the service in the course of this effort.

I am aware of the passion and interest this issue has across a broad range of stakeholders. I have appreciated hearing the perspectives of our friends in public safety, representatives of federal, state, and local governments, and wireless industry stakeholders who offer these services. I look forward to continuing those conversations this year as we work through the

February 4, 2026

Page 2

regular order process to achieve consensus that can pass both the House and Senate and be signed into law by the year's end.

So, let me thank Representatives McClellan and Dunn for their leadership in this effort that is absolutely critical to keeping first responders connected when it matters most.

I want to yield the remainder of my time to Representative McClellan.

Mr. PALLONE. And I yield back the remainder—well, actually, I want to yield the remainder of my time to Representative McClellan.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. Thank you, Ranking Member Pallone and Chairman Hudson and Ranking Member Matsui, for holding this critically important hearing.

This past week, most of the country was inundated by Winter Storm Fern, which canceled nearly 2,000 flights, left hundreds of thousands without power, and resulted in more than 50 deaths, three of them in Virginia.

I would like to thank the witnesses and our first responders for their work and continued investments in FirstNet that have been made throughout the Nation, the Commonwealth, and the Fourth District.

Born out of the tragic events of September 11, FirstNet is essential to ensuring our public safety community has the reliable, interoperable tools and resources necessary to respond to our most severe emergencies. This is critically important as we see more and more severe natural disasters like Winter Storm Fern and the mega hurricanes that we have seen.

However, as FirstNet approaches the end of its current authorization, it is clear that the program is operating without sufficient, up-to-date oversight and accountability measures in place. Reauthorization is not simply about extending the program, it is about strengthening governance, reinforcing transparency, and ensuring that Congress retains appropriate visibility into how the nationwide public safety broadband network operates.

I am glad to work with my colleague from Florida, Mr. Dunn, on this legislation, and I look forward to continuing our bipartisan efforts to strengthen FirstNet so it can continue to serve first responders and the communities that depend on them.

Thank you, and I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Ms. McClellan follows:]

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Member Jennifer McClellan

Hearing on “Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization”

February 4, 2026

Thank you, Chairman Hudson and Ranking Member Matsui, for holding this hearing.

This past week, most of the country was inundated by a snowstorm that caused nearly 2,000 flight cancellations, left hundreds of thousands without power, and resulted in more than 50 deaths, 3 of them Virginians.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their work and the continued investments FirstNet has made throughout the Commonwealth and the Fourth Congressional District.

Borne out of the tragic events of September 11, FirstNet is essential to ensuring our public safety community has the reliable, interoperable tools and resources necessary to respond to our most severe emergencies.

However, as FirstNet approaches the end of its current authorization, it is clear that the program is operating without sufficient, up-to-date oversight and accountability measures in place. Reauthorization is not simply about extending this program; it is about strengthening governance, reinforcing transparency, and ensuring that Congress retains appropriate visibility into how the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network is operating.

I am glad to work with my colleague from Florida, Mr. Dunn, on this legislation, and I look forward to continuing our bipartisan efforts to strengthen FirstNet so it can continue to serve first responders and the communities that depend on them.

Mr. PALLONE. And I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. HUDSON. The gentlelady yields back. The gentleman yields back. Thank you.

We have now concluded with Member opening statements. The Chair reminds Members that, pursuant to the committee rules, all Members' opening statements will be made part of the record.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today to testify before this subcommittee. Our witnesses will have 5 minutes to provide an opening statement, which will be followed by a round of questions from the Members.

The witnesses here before us today are Sheriff Michael Adkinson, acting board chair of the First Responder Network Authority and sheriff of Walton County, Florida; Michael Dame, Associate Administrator, Office of Public Safety Communications at NTIA; and Scott Agnew, president of FirstNet and Public Safety Mobility at AT&T.

Thank you all for being here.

Sheriff Adkinson, you are recognized for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

STATEMENTS OF MICHAEL A. ADKINSON, JR., ACTING BOARD CHAIR, FIRST RESPONDER NETWORK AUTHORITY, AND SHERIFF, WALTON COUNTY, FLORIDA; MICHAEL E. DAME, ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS, NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION; AND SCOTT AGNEW, PRESIDENT, FIRSTNET AND PUBLIC SAFETY MOBILITY, AT&T, INC.

STATEMENT OF SHERIFF MICHAEL A. ADKINSON, Jr.

Sheriff ADKINSON. Thank you, Chair Hudson, Chair Guthrie, Ranking Member Matsui, Ranking Member Pallone.

As previously stated, my name is Mike Adkinson. I am the acting board chair of the FirstNet Authority. By way of my day job, I am a sheriff in Walton County, Florida. Uniquely, I represent professional fire rescue emergency services and air medical as well as 9-1-1 communication center.

Twenty-five years ago—you have heard it—this Nation faced challenges. I remember getting up that morning, putting on a police officer uniform for the Tallahassee Police Department, and saying, "What is going on? What is happening?"

The reality of it is that this Congress, along with public safety's input, made a decision that I think fundamentally improved the well-being of the citizens of the United States and the first responders they serve, which is you built a purpose-built network to ensure that first responders could communicate during times of emergency. I will tell you that I think it is a generational infrastructure success.

I have been on the board about a year and a half along with six new board members, and we have marveled at what has been accomplished. And I will tell you that I am proud of the work that the Congress has done and the First Responder Network has done.

But my job is to be honest and to be a good steward of the public's trust and the responsibility that you have given us. I am well aware of the inspector general reports. We became aware of

them right after we came into office, the new board members. It was our first thought and responsibility is to lean into this. You are not going to hear me make excuses for that. I am not in the business of excuses.

As I told the executive director, and as the board said to the executive director and staff members, we are in the business of getting things done. And so what that means is there will be accountability. There will be transparency. You will work with the Office of the Inspector General, and we will resolve these issues. Period, full stop. Then, whoever should be held accountable should be held accountable.

That is the reality of where we are at, and I am not going to belabor that point because I think it speaks for itself.

I think that there is an opportunity now to do some things that make a difference. If FirstNet has been successful, I believe it will continue to be successful. There are some things I think we can do to make it better. Let me give you an example.

As I briefly mentioned, six of us came on board at one time. That is an incredibly difficult way to maintain continuity of government when you have six new people who have no previous history on that board itself. We would ask that you consider staggering these terms to 3 years.

By the way, that was in the original legislation. It just did not contemplate reoccurring, that you grant the Secretary of the Department of Commerce the ability to continue to stagger these terms. That is just good governance.

We would also say this, that this should be a public safety mindset on this board, and to that end we would ask that you make a minimum five seats designated for public safety disciplines. We think that is important. That is actually, I believe, the intent. We are asking that you codify it into law, and that is important.

And lastly, I will say this: There are too many captains on the ship. The reality of this is, if you are going to—if you are going to hold me accountable, please give me the authority to make decisions, and I think that is crucial.

We have a good working relationship with NTIA. We are going to continue to do that. But it is not about individuals. It is about systems, and any time that you have a single solution optimization, you have system fragility. You have to make sure this thing is written down, that it is done correctly, that it is clear to everyone involved about how we are going to do some things. I think that is crucially important.

I am going to go back and say this again: Nothing about what I just said takes away from what I think is a phenomenal generational improvement.

I liken it to the Eisenhower interstate system. Everybody can drive on it. It is the service of the people. Some people, some local government, some private industry may build private roads. That is fine, that is good. Our job is to make sure it works, that we are good stewards of the public's money, and we do what we do in the light of the sunshine, as we say in Florida, Representative Castor, as you well know. This is the way we should be doing business.

I will hold myself fully accountable. As I said to the chair the other day, you can have my resignation if you do not believe that I am doing this appropriately.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Sheriff Adkinson follows:]

**Written Statement of
Sheriff Michael A. Adkinson, Jr.,
Acting Board Chair of the First Responder Network Authority**

**Before the U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce's
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“*Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization*”**

February 4, 2026

Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Pallone and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Michael Adkinson, Sheriff of Walton County, Florida and the Acting Board Chair of the First Responder Network Authority. I am honored to appear before you today to provide testimony regarding FirstNet's role in public safety.

Introduction

Nearly twenty-five years ago, on September 11, 2001, our nation endured a devastating attack that exposed a critical vulnerability in our public safety infrastructure. America's first responders answered the call of duty that day, moving toward danger with unwavering courage and selflessness. Yet they were hampered by communication systems that were fragmented, incompatible, and overwhelmed. This failure to communicate cost lives.

In response, Congress made a deliberate and historic decision—guided by the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission and the urgent appeals of the public safety community—to establish a single, nationwide, interoperable broadband network dedicated exclusively to public safety. That decision became the foundation for legislation creating the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN), known as FirstNet.

Today, Congress's vision is an operational reality for our nation's first responders. FirstNet spans millions of square miles, delivering coverage across urban centers, rural communities, tribal lands, and U.S. territories. The network provides capabilities that public safety did not previously have, including 24/7 priority and preemption for first responders, nationwide interoperability, a dedicated core, on-demand mobile cellular assets, and scalable broadband capacity for mission-critical applications. As of September 30, 2025, over 30,000 public safety

agencies and organizations have adopted FirstNet, including where I serve as sheriff in Walton County, Florida.

The Foundation for Success

Congress laid the foundation for FirstNet's success through the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012.¹ The Act created a model that sought to combine private sector innovation with government oversight to ensure performance and coverage standards essential to public safety.

First and foremost, Congress allocated 20 megahertz of nationwide spectrum, now known as Band 14, exclusively for public safety, ensuring first responders have prioritized access to communications when it matters most.

Second, Congress required the FirstNet Authority to be self-sustaining and to collect and reinvest fees generated under its nationwide public safety broadband network contract. The Government Accountability Office estimated that constructing and operating a nationwide public safety broadband network over the first 10 years could cost between \$12 billion to \$47 billion, depending on factors such as business model, use of existing infrastructure, reliability, and coverage.² Congress provided \$7 billion from commercial spectrum auction proceeds for the initial 4G LTE buildout. Additionally, under a public-private arrangement, FirstNet's contractor, AT&T, agreed to pay approximately \$18 billion over its 25-year contract term for the Band 14 spectrum lease. The FirstNet Authority determines how those funds are reinvested into the network, consistent with the law. This public-private model, initially capitalized with auction proceeds and sustained by contract fees, allows continuous improvements to public safety communications without requiring new taxpayer funding.³

¹ Pub. L. No. 112-96, Title VI, 126 Stat. 156, see: <https://www.congress.gov/112/plaws/publ96/PLAW-112publ96.pdf>

² GAO Report (2015): Cost estimate range \$12–\$47 billion for construction and operation over 10 years ([GAO-15-407 Highlights PDF](#))

³ GAO Report (2022): FirstNet statutory requirements and reinvestment responsibilities ([GAO-22-104915](#))

Finally, Congress established a 15-member Board, which I am honored to serve on, composed of leaders from public safety, the private sector, and experts in finance and technology representing state, local, and federal perspectives. This diverse composition ensures decisions reflect both the operational realities of first responders, and the technical demands of a nationwide public safety broadband network. It is incumbent on the Board to provide strategic direction and rigorous oversight to guarantee (i) that the FirstNet Authority fulfills its statutory mandate and (ii) that the network evolves to meet the changing mission-critical needs of public safety. Through this governance structure, Congress sought to ensure accountability, transparency, and a direct voice for public safety in shaping the future of emergency communications.

FirstNet also demonstrated something critically important that did not exist before its creation: that there *is* a viable market for high-quality, mission-critical broadband services tailored to public safety. By aggregating demand, setting clear performance expectations, and proving that first responders would adopt and pay for a network built to their needs, FirstNet helped catalyze private-sector investment well beyond the confines of the original public safety broadband network contract.

At the same time, success should not breed complacency. We must not rest on our laurels. As technologies evolve and public safety's operational demands grow more complex, there are opportunities to improve how the network is managed, how investments are prioritized, and how performance is measured. Continued vigilance is necessary to ensure that FirstNet delivers a clear net benefit to public safety, that reinvestments are disciplined and aligned with mission needs, and that robust oversight mechanisms remain firmly in place. Congress wisely paired innovation with accountability in the original statute; honoring that balance means continually asking hard questions, refining governance, and ensuring transparency so that FirstNet remains worthy of the trust placed in it by first responders and the American public.

A Network Built by and for Public Safety

From the start, FirstNet was built with continuous input from the public safety community. The Act requires consultation with federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial stakeholders, and it established the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) to ensure the network reflects real-

world operational needs. Through these channels, public safety informs coverage objectives, network hardening, priority and preemption, mission-critical services, deployable assets, rural and remote coverage, in-building solutions, cybersecurity, and resiliency needed to operate during disasters, major events, and daily incidents. This engagement ensures that FirstNet is not merely a network with public safety features layered on top: it is a purpose-built public safety platform that adapts as threats evolve and technology advances.

The FirstNet Authority also works with public safety officials to plan for major events. Preparations are underway for the 2026 FIFA World Cup soccer tournament in multiple U.S. cities and for America 250 events to ensure mission execution and public safety.

FirstNet Future Investment

The FirstNet Authority has continued to make investments that expand coverage and evolve capabilities. In 2024, the Board approved a multi-year investment initiative to deliver full 5G capabilities via a standalone core, expand mission-critical services, bolster the deployable fleet, enhance in-building coverage, and add new sites to improve reach and reliability. FirstNet also convened coverage enhancement workshops across the country with state and local agencies to drive future investments where public safety needs them most.

Office of Inspector General Oversight

Of course, there remains room for improvement. As members of this Subcommittee well know, the Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General (OIG) has performed significant oversight of the FirstNet Authority since 2014. In 2024 alone, there were four audit reports and two management alerts addressing a range of issues, including contract modifications, coverage objective targets, and device connection targets. These reviews underscore the importance of rigorous oversight of the FirstNet contract.

As the Acting Board Chair, I take these recommendations seriously. My colleagues and I on the Board have directed FirstNet Authority management to resolve and close these recommendations expeditiously and to address the overarching theme identified by the OIG. Our duty to serve the

public safety users of FirstNet requires us to provide strong oversight of the network and to not accept excuses, but rather focus on outcomes.

Reauthorization

Under the Act, FirstNet is scheduled to terminate in February 2027, which will create a risk to continued network operations and may result in a potential loss of service for public safety users. Reauthorization presents a prime opportunity to not only affirm Congress's commitment to public safety, but to improve FirstNet and set it up for success for future years. A currency of trust has been developed in the continuity of service provided by FirstNet. It would be hard to overstate the potential risk to public safety if that were to be eroded by a failure of reauthorization. We would risk the collapse of the nationwide interoperability effort the 9/11 Commission sought to address.

The success of FirstNet hinges on private sector innovation paired with rigorous oversight. However, over the past 14 years, there have been persistent challenges with contract oversight and accountability. As Acting Board Chair I have observed that the roles and responsibilities of NTIA, the Board, and the Authority are not well defined in the statute. Bluntly, when everyone is responsible no one is accountable. Reauthorization provides Congress with a clear opportunity to address these challenges directly by clarifying statutory roles, responsibilities, and the chain of command among NTIA, the Board, and the Authority.

Further, the law currently limits reinvestment to the network core or radio access network (RAN). While this made sense in 2012 during the launch of 4G LTE, as we move toward software driven and AI enabled 6G capabilities we risk locking FirstNet into technologies that were state-of-the-art 14 years ago. Expanding reinvestment authorities to include emerging technologies and services, such as cybersecurity enhancements, deployable assets, and advanced analytics will ensure the network continues to meet evolving public safety needs and affords our first responders access to the best possible technology.

There are a host of reforms Congress can consider to codify lessons learned over the past 14 years. This includes a simple but important reform near and dear to my heart—staggering the

Board terms across three years to ensure more continuity and consistency among our membership. By way of example, in November of 2024 six new board members were empaneled at the same time. This, as you can imagine, brings serious continuity challenges. I also am a strong believer in the voice that public safety can provide to the Board. While the law requires that three of the board members represent public safety, I encourage Congress to increase this number to five. In practice, this is how the Board is typically staffed and allows the Secretary of Commerce to nominate a broad array of public safety voices to the Board—from police (including local sheriffs like myself and major city police like my fellow board member Chief Norman), to fire, to EMS and 9-1-1. Finally, I look forward to working with you to provide additional views on related legislation.

I look forward to discussing these ideas and more today. And, of course, I stand ready to work with Congress and the Members of this Subcommittee to improve the FirstNet program for our first responders across the nation. Thank you.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

Mr. Dame, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF MICHAEL E. DAME

Mr. DAME. Good morning, Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Pallone, and members of the subcommittee. My name is Mike Dame, and I am the Associate Administrator for Public Safety Communications with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

I have served at NTIA for 13 years, with a total of 29 years of Federal service. My portfolio includes NTIA's statutory and delegated responsibilities related to the FirstNet Authority and Next Generation 9-1-1 activities. I am honored to appear today to provide testimony regarding the reauthorization of FirstNet.

Fourteen years ago, this committee pioneered and Congress passed landmark legislation with the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012, which established the First Responder Network Authority and provided first responders with a much-needed nationwide interoperable public safety broadband network.

For decades prior to FirstNet, there were far too many instances of major communications failures that cost lives or impeded emergency response. Before Congress created FirstNet, first responders lacked dedicated access to spectrum and the ability to connect regardless of congestion. Public safety users instead relied on commercial telecommunications networks that treated them no differently than everyday consumer traffic.

FirstNet has achieved incredible milestones in 14 short years to serve the needs of public safety by awarding a contract to a nationwide telecommunications carrier, completing its initial build-out of the Band 14 network comprised of over 60,000 cell sites, and now serving tens of thousands of public safety agencies as subscribers and millions of device connections.

Despite these major accomplishments, rigorous oversight of the FirstNet Authority and the multibillion-dollar contract is critical to protect first responders and taxpayer dollars. The Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General has performed significant review and evaluation of the FirstNet Authority. The overarching theme across all of these inspector general audits is a need for stronger and more systemic contract oversight.

As Congress looks to reauthorize FirstNet, NTIA stands ready to support the committee with key reforms to the law based on lessons learned from the past 14 years. For example, I have witnessed how the FirstNet Authority's statutorily created dotted line of independence has been a source of confusion and misunderstanding since 2012.

Recent OIG reviews and my own experience illustrate how FirstNet's unclear lines of authority blur responsibility and create friction between FirstNet management, the board, and NTIA. Legislation should reform the structure of the FirstNet Authority by making an NTIA line office similar to NTIA's other existing line offices.

To be clear, I know that some public safety groups and stakeholders have expressed concerns with this proposed change, but

this reform would strengthen FirstNet's mission by enabling clear oversight and more efficient stewardship of resources in service to first responders. All of these savings will be redirected into the network to benefit public safety.

That said, I recognize that during a time of crisis, public safety must act quickly. Stakeholders have expressed fears about bureaucrats second-guessing decisions or delaying action. That, of course, would be unacceptable. And NTIA appreciates the draft text call to clarify what activities would need prior approval from NTIA.

However, other arguments against the removal of FirstNet Authority independence appear to either misunderstand or misstate the current lines of authority and blur the roles of FirstNet Authority staff and the FirstNet Board. Importantly, placing the authority clearly into NTIA would have no impact whatsoever on the roles and responsibilities of the FirstNet Board. In fact, NTIA believes that the forms being contemplated by this committee would further strength the board by staggering the board terms, driving continuity, and statutorily adding additional public safety seats.

It is often said that FirstNet is a public safety network built for and by public safety. That is because of the expertise imbedded in both the FirstNet Board and the Public Safety Advisory Committee. NTIA has no interest in supplanting that expertise. Instead, we rely on it every day.

I strongly believe that we all share the same goal: enhancing the public safety network for the benefit of public safety. And I am confident that, working together in good faith, we can get to a place where we can achieve that goal and set public safety up for success for the next 10 years.

I appreciate the thoughtful draft the committee has shared with the public. I look forward to discussing these ideas today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Dame follows:]

**Written Statement of
Michael E. Dame
Associate Administrator for Public Safety Communications,
National Telecommunications and Information Administration**

**Before the U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce's
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
*"Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization"***

February 4, 2026

Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Pallone and distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, my name is Mike Dame, and I am the Associate Administrator for Public Safety Communications with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). My portfolio includes NTIA's statutory and delegated responsibilities related to the FirstNet Authority, Next Generation 9-1-1 activities, and executive management over the Public Wireless Supply Chain Innovation Fund. I am honored to appear before you today to provide testimony regarding the reauthorization of FirstNet.

Introduction

Fourteen years ago, this Committee pioneered, and Congress passed, landmark legislation with the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 (or 2012 Act), which established the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) and provided first responders with a much needed nationwide, interoperable public safety broadband network. For decades prior to FirstNet, there were far too many instances of major communications failures that cost lives or impeded emergency response. The tragic events of September 11, 2001, and subsequent findings of the 9/11 Commission are but one of many such examples. Before Congress created FirstNet, first responders lacked dedicated access to spectrum and the ability to connect regardless of congestion; public safety users instead relied on commercial telecommunications networks that treated them no differently than everyday consumer traffic. This gap highlighted the need for a dedicated network, not just a market solution, to ensure public safety communications are prioritized even when commercial incentives do not. Because of the 2012 Act, first responders now have dedicated spectrum, priority, preemption, and a nationwide network for their communications needs as they perform lifesaving work in communities across the country.

FirstNet's Success

As Sheriff Adkinson notes in his statement, the establishment of FirstNet triggered a competitive market whereby wireless telecommunications companies now view public safety as a viable niche customer, given their specific needs and requirements associated with performing life-saving, mission critical duties. Simply put, in 2012 there was no marketplace for public safety. Today, other providers have entered the market with competitive offerings, benefiting first responders by expanding choice, incentivizing innovation and service quality, and placing downward pressure on costs—outcomes that ultimately strengthen public safety communications.

When I started at NTIA in late 2012, FirstNet was nothing more than a PowerPoint presentation. Five short years later, FirstNet had a major telecommunications carrier as its network provider. Only six years after that, FirstNet had completed its initial buildout of the Band 14 network—comprised of over 60,000 cell sites. Now, in time for the 2012 Act's 14th anniversary later this month, FirstNet has over 30,000 public safety agencies as subscribers, and 7.8 million device connections.

From a concept debated in this very hearing room to a nationwide network, FirstNet has transformed public safety communications. Reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority is an opportunity to reinforce the public safety broadband market and bolster the current competitive climate.

Office of Inspector General Oversight

FirstNet has achieved major successes and accomplishments, however rigorous oversight of the FirstNet Authority and the multibillion-dollar network contract is nonetheless critical to protect first responders and taxpayer dollars. As you know, the Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General (OIG) has performed significant review and evaluation of the FirstNet Authority. In 2024 alone, there were four audit reports addressing a range of issues, including contract modifications, coverage and device connection targets, and FirstNet's response to the Maui wildfires. The overarching theme across all these Inspector General audits is the need for stronger and more systematic contract oversight. Accordingly, the OIG previously elevated

responsibility for directing FirstNet’s implementation of audit recommendations from the FirstNet Executive Director to the NTIA Administrator, in response to challenges within the FirstNet Authority.

Based on dozens of these and similar OIG findings and my own experience, I believe that FirstNet—and by extension, first responders and taxpayers—would benefit from closer alignment with NTIA and the Department of Commerce. This is especially true with respect to how contract performance, compliance, and reinvestment decisions are reviewed. In particular, the chain of command for overseeing the network contract should run through NTIA and the Department of Commerce, with clear lines of authority and accountability. Over time, FirstNet’s operational “independence” has blurred those lines, making it more difficult to ensure consistent oversight, timely escalation of issues, and accountability for performance. Strengthening and clarifying these lines of accountability would better ensure that oversight of the network provider is consistent, transparent, and firmly grounded in FirstNet’s public safety mission.

Our obligation to the first responders who rely on FirstNet requires nothing less than clarity in governance and robust, disciplined oversight of the network provider. In addition to improving accountability, greater alignment within the Department would also create administrative efficiencies by reducing duplication and clarifying roles and responsibilities. Over time, those efficiencies would help ensure that more resources are directed toward improving network performance and public safety outcomes, rather than unnecessary bureaucracy.

Administration’s Reauthorization Priorities

If Congress decides to reauthorize FirstNet, NTIA stands ready to support the Committee with key reforms to the law based on lessons learned from the past 14 years.

First, as I touched on earlier, I have witnessed how the FirstNet Authority’s independence has been a source of confusion and misunderstanding. Recent OIG reviews—and my own experience—illustrate how FirstNet’s unclear lines of authority blur responsibility and create friction between leadership, the Board, and NTIA. Legislation should reform the structure of the FirstNet Authority by making it an NTIA line office similar to NTIA’s other existing line offices.

This fix would clarify roles, align authority with responsibility, and reinforce accountability. This reform would strengthen FirstNet's mission by enabling clearer oversight and more efficient stewardship of resources in service of first responders. Importantly, this reform would not impact the roles and responsibilities of the FirstNet Board or Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC).

Second, I'd also like to echo the reform ideas highlighted by Sheriff Adkinson regarding the FirstNet Authority Board and investments in the network. The Board serves an essential function, blending experiences from public safety, telecommunications, broadband, financial, and business experts. Staggering the board's terms will increase continuity, preventing the simultaneous turnover of as many as half the board's members.

Third, updates to definitions in the law should provide flexibility that ensures FirstNet will be able to keep pace with technological innovation and provide new technological opportunities to first responders. Similarly, a technical correction to the statutory fee review requirement, which is currently limited to a review period of one fiscal year, would ensure that NTIA and the FirstNet Authority can better anticipate and plan investments over time. Making generational upgrades to telecommunications networks is a multi-year effort and performing the fee review analysis beyond a single fiscal year aligns with that reality.

Fourth, a 10-year reauthorization would provide important certainty for First Responders, while balancing the needs of Congress to conduct important oversight and make any necessary course corrections. The contract with AT&T expires in 2042, so a 10-year reauthorization would provide Congress time to reevaluate FirstNet one more time before any re-bid of the contract would take place.

Fifth and finally, any legislative changes should be consistent with maximizing the competitiveness of the recompetitiveness process at the end of the current 25-year contract.

I look forward to discussing these ideas today. I am happy to address any questions that the Subcommittee may have for me. Thank you.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

Mr. Agnew, you are recognized for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

STATEMENT OF SCOTT AGNEW

Mr. AGNEW. Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Pallone, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Scott Agnew, and I serve as president of FirstNet and Public Sector Mobility at AT&T. I am responsible for ensuring AT&T fulfills its Federal obligation to deploy, operate, and continuously evolve the FirstNet network for America's first responders. AT&T strongly supports reauthorization of FirstNet, and we support doing so well in advance of early 2027.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to public safety and for taking the crucial first steps of releasing draft bipartisan legislation. We look forward to working with you to ensure FirstNet continues to deliver for the vital first responder community.

FirstNet represents one of the most successful public-private partnerships in modern infrastructure policy. In 2017, AT&T was the only major carrier to answer Congress' call and enter the competitive bidding process. Ultimately, AT&T was selected over other bidders to build and operate this nationwide public safety network. The network was completed on time and on budget in March of 2023, and it continues to expand and provide new lifesaving services.

Since 2017, we have built out an interoperable network that covers nearly 3 million square miles, making it hundreds of thousands of square miles larger on average than commercial networks. This is a critical advantage for rural, Tribal, and remote communities. Today, despite other marketplace options, more first responders choose FirstNet than any other network.

This historic build was initially funded by the enacting statute's allocation of \$6.5 billion from auction proceeds, an auction in which AT&T spent more than \$18 billion. Going forward, the statute requires permanent self-funding for operations and expansion, which is achieved solely by AT&T sustainability payments and additional capital contributions from AT&T.

Indeed, AT&T has demonstrated unparalleled commitment by investing more than \$14 billion of its own capital since the beginning of the FirstNet partnership and expects to invest approximately \$40 billion of its own capital to build and operate FirstNet over the life of the contract.

The hallmark features of FirstNet are its dedicated network core and its always-on priority preemption across Band 14 and all of AT&T's 5G and LT commercial spectrum. That means public safety can communicate when other networks are congested, like during planned events, such as the Super Bowl in Louisiana or natural disasters like hurricanes in North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida as well as floodings in Texas or wildland fires in California.

As designed by Congress, the network will evolve based on direct feedback from public safety. Because of self-sustaining funding, the

program has plans to invest more than \$8 billion over the next decade to evolve the network using public safety feedback. This includes delivering a physically separated 5G core, providing public safety grade direct-to-device satellite connectivity, and FirstNet Fusion, the first mission critical communications platform that will enable unprecedented interoperability across agencies, carriers, and technologies.

The true measure of FirstNet is performance during crisis. During hurricanes Helene and Milton, FirstNet supported more than 260 emergency requests across multiple States, restoring coverage and sustaining public safety communications when commercial networks are strained or unavailable.

And during the assassination attempt of the President in Butler, Pennsylvania, FirstNet performed exactly as designed. While commercial networks experienced congestion, FirstNet delivered uninterrupted service.

During these and other mutual aid events, FirstNet is the trusted partner that ensures reliable and interoperable communications. These are not isolated examples. They are a result of a network built specifically for and by public safety.

Congress made a bold and necessary decision when it created FirstNet. The vision is now a reality, and it is working.

AT&T appreciates the committee's bipartisan attention to reauthorizing FirstNet. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Agnew follows:]

STATEMENT OF SCOTT AGNEW
AT&T President – FirstNet and Public Sector Mobility
AT&T, Inc.

Hearing: “Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization”

**Before the Subcommittee on Communications & Technology of the
United States House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce**

February 4, 2026

Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Pallone and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide an update on the FirstNet network and AT&T’s essential role in its expansive deployment, strong performance, nationwide coverage, cutting-edge innovations, and lifesaving public-safety impact.

My name is Scott Agnew. I am the President of FirstNet & Public Sector Mobility at AT&T. I lead AT&T’s FirstNet organization and am responsible for ensuring that AT&T meets its federal contract obligations regarding FirstNet’s deployment, performance, operations, and public-safety engagement.

We applaud your leadership and commitment to public safety, and for taking the crucial first step of releasing draft bipartisan legislation that supports reauthorization. We look forward to working with you and the Energy and Commerce Committee to ensure FirstNet continues to deliver for our nation’s first responders.

Today, I will discuss how AT&T is ensuring that FirstNet delivers on Congress’s vision to create a resilient, interoperable broadband network for America’s first responders and the status of FirstNet’s nationwide deployment and adoption. I will also highlight that AT&T’s commitment to FirstNet extends beyond the contractual requirements and how AT&T has demonstrated its commitment to public safety with its ability to innovate and respond to the ever-evolving public safety needs.

The Public Safety Imperative of FirstNet

Let me begin by stating that AT&T stands with public safety organizations like the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), National Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), and many others, and fully supports the reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority).¹ Due to the critical nature of this network to our first responder community,

¹

<https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/Congressional/IACP%20Urges%20Support%20for%20Preserving%20FirstNet%20in%20Joint%20to%20Congress.pdf>

we support reauthorization in advance of its current February 2027 expiration. First responders bravely operate in high-stakes situations (such as terror attacks and natural disasters) where delays in communications can literally mean the difference between life or death to first responders themselves and the people living in impacted communities. Prior to FirstNet, first responders relied on a patchwork of incompatible radio systems and congested commercial networks. In disasters or mass crowd events, commercial networks often become overloaded, leaving public safety agencies struggling to communicate.

Fortunately, Congress established the FirstNet Authority to build a nationwide high-speed interoperable broadband network dedicated to public safety—one in which first responders have priority, preemption, dedicated spectrum when they need it, and interoperability. FirstNet is not merely “another wireless network” but a mission-critical infrastructure asset for the nation’s public safety community.

I could not be prouder of all we’ve accomplished in just 8 years. As discussed in detail below, the FirstNet network has grown from serving zero to nearly 30,600 public safety agencies and direct-support organizations. FirstNet has been on the frontline of countless emergencies and national disasters and has deployed hundreds of portable mobile assets to support our first responders during those events. While we are proud of our accomplishments to date, we are equally excited about the opportunities ahead, including the 5G network upgrades, the physically separate 5G core, and launch of our new FirstNet Fusion service.

A Successful Public-Private Partnership

January 2026 marks ten years since the FirstNet RFP’s release, and the success of the public-private partnership between the FirstNet Authority and AT&T is clear. AT&T stood alone among the four nationwide carriers at the time in answering Public Safety’s call to build a self-sustaining nationwide interoperable broadband network. AT&T entered the competitive bidding process and was ultimately selected over the other bidders to build and operate FirstNet. Together, the FirstNet Authority and AT&T have delivered precisely what the statute envisioned: a network planned with FirstNet Board oversight; the initial build funded through AWS spectrum auction proceeds; built and operated by AT&T; and maintained on a sustainable footing through AT&T’s Band 14 usage payments. This cycle continues today. Public Safety informs priorities for the next phase of enhancements; the FirstNet Board approves network upgrades; those upgrades are funded from ongoing sustainability payments; and AT&T executes the approved plans. The result is a resilient, evolving, and fiscally self-sustaining interoperable network that demonstrates the enduring strength of this public-private partnership.

FirstNet Deployment, Coverage, and Adoption: Status and Progress

The Initial Build

In March 2023, AT&T completed the initial build of the network both on-time and on-budget. The initial build covered more than 2.91 million square miles across all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the five U.S. territories. Importantly, FirstNet is an all-band solution, meaning public safety has priority and preemption on the FirstNet Authority's licensed Band 14 as well as AT&T commercial 5G and LTE spectrum. This means any commercial investment by AT&T to expand coverage and capacity also benefits first responders on FirstNet.

As part of the initial FirstNet build, AT&T collaborated with small and rural wireless providers to quickly expand the reach of FirstNet and launched 2,000 FirstNet tower sites in rural and tribal areas. In addition, nearly 1,200 new FirstNet towers were deployed in areas state leaders and the public safety community identified as needing additional wireless coverage.

From the beginning, AT&T has demonstrated its commitment to public safety by investing its own capital to ensure efficient and rapid deployment of the network. As noted above, this historic build was initially funded by the enacting statute's allocation of \$6.5 billion from auction proceeds—an auction in which *AT&T spent more than \$18 billion*. Indeed, AT&T has demonstrated unparalleled commitment by investing more than \$14 billion of its own capital since the beginning of the FirstNet partnership, and expects to invest approximately \$40 billion of its own capital to build and operate FirstNet over the life of the 25-year contract.

The Next Phase of the Buildout

Since completion of the initial build, the network continues to expand as Congress envisioned. The FirstNet Authority announced the next phase of FirstNet buildout and network evolution that directs \$6 billion over the next ten years for 5G network upgrades; a dedicated, physically separate 5G standalone core; research and development in public safety technology solutions, and over \$2 billion for additional coverage enhancements. To inform the future coverage buildout, the FirstNet Authority has built a First Responder Impact Model to identify potential areas of interest for future tower investment for public safety. The FirstNet Authority is also hosting joint meetings with AT&T and public safety stakeholders in all 50 states, DC, and the five U.S. territories to solicit feedback from public safety and inform the future buildout of FirstNet coverage.

In 2024, as part of the FirstNet Authority's reinvestment announcement, AT&T committed to deploy an additional 1,000 new Band 14 tower sites over 2 years, which were completed ahead of schedule and at no cost to the FirstNet Authority. Today, the FirstNet coverage footprint spans nearly 3 million square miles across urban, suburban, rural, tribal, and territorial areas. The footprint is 200,000 square miles on average larger than competing commercial networks, an area larger than the state of California that is particularly valuable in serving more remote areas. Since the FirstNet buildout began, this effort increased coverage on tribal lands across the United States by more than 64 percent.

The ‘ROG’ Assets

In addition to our unmatched footprint, AT&T also provides unmatched support to public safety through the AT&T FirstNet Response Operations Group™ also known as the “ROG”. The ROG is a dedicated team of former first responders that deploys dedicated network assets at the request of local, state and federal agencies to ensure connectivity during critical events, whether they are planned events or emergency response events. The ROG assets, which can be requested free of charge by FirstNet subscribed agencies, include:

- A fleet of 190+ deployables that boost FirstNet wireless coverage in the aftermath of an emergency incident or help augment network capacity and coverage during a planned event. This fleet includes SatCOLTs (Satellite Cell on Light Truck), Compact Rapid Deployables (CRDs), mini-CRDs, and other mobile assets, available at no additional cost to subscribing public safety agencies.
- Deployable assets that connect via satellite backhaul and provide FirstNet wireless service; they require minimal setup time and are designed for rapid deployment in disasters or special events.
- And smaller, more portable assets, like the miniCRD unit, for example, that fits in two fortified suitcases that can be easily transported into an emergency area. These assets offer FirstNet LTE coverage up to ½ mile in challenging environments.

The AT&T ROG deployables have been vital in disaster response, special event support, and filling “last-mile” coverage gaps during planned and emergency response events. Below, I will use a few real-world scenarios to illustrate how valuable the deployable fleet is in our response to critical events.

FirstNet in Action

FirstNet adoption continues to grow steadily and currently supports nearly 8 million connections, serving nearly 30,600 public safety agencies and direct-support organizations.

The true measure of FirstNet is not just buildout statistics or its share of eligible users—it is how the network performs during critical events when lives are at stake. Time and again, FirstNet has distinguished itself from commercial offers that are marketed and sold to public safety. FirstNet has proven its value in our nation’s most challenging moments.

Keeping First Responders Connected Through Hurricanes Helene and Milton

In the fall of 2024, two back-to-back storms, Hurricane Helene (Category 4) and Hurricane Milton (Category 3), devastated wide swaths of the Southeast. FirstNet proved it could scale and respond to public safety’s needs through network restoration and by deploying Satellite Cells on Light Trucks (SatCOLTs), Compact Rapid Deployables (CRDs), mini-CRDs, and Response

Communications Vehicles to restore coverage where towers and power were down. Across Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee, and Virginia, FirstNet supported more than 260 emergency requests from public safety, while FirstNet Strike Teams worked shoulder-to-shoulder with first responders in flooded, storm-ravaged communities. In addition, the state of North Carolina required additional support to restore operations for a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) that lost its wireline connection during Hurricane Helene. FirstNet provided reliable connectivity that supported that PSAP's operations for months following Hurricane Helene.

Responding to Catastrophic Flooding in Central Texas

In July 2025, record rainfall caused deadly flooding along the Guadalupe River in South Central Texas. Within hours, the AT&T FirstNet ROG was on the ground, supporting the Emergency Operations Center in Kerrville, the urban search and rescue (USAR) teams, and deploying SatCOLTs, CRDs, LEO Emergency Communication Portables (LECPs) and an amphibious vehicle to reach isolated areas. More than 20 public safety support requests were answered. In total, more than 20+ portable cell tower assets were deployed. And within 48 hours, AT&T launched a new macro cell tower site in Hunt, Texas to expand area coverage and capacity to support the influx of volunteers, relief organizations, and visitors aiding in the response efforts. Importantly, this site also provides dedicated connectivity for public safety with Band 14 — permanently expanding dedicated coverage for first responders in the region. As rescue teams waded into floodwaters, FirstNet delivered the connectivity they needed to coordinate evacuations, communicate across jurisdictions, and keep both responders and residents safe.

Securing Communications During the Assassination Attempt in Butler, Pennsylvania

During the July 2024 assassination attempt at President Trump's campaign rally in Butler, PA, FirstNet performed exactly as designed. With thousands of attendees overwhelming commercial networks, FirstNet's always-on priority and preemption ensured uninterrupted communications for hundreds of federal, state, and local first responders. Within minutes of the incident, more than 1,200 instances of First Priority® safeguarded critical calls, protecting first responders from network congestion, and over 11,000 voice and data sessions were completed on FirstNet in just one hour at the peak of the response. Despite network congestion and issues with "calls and texts [being] delayed" on commercial networks, the U.S. House Taskforce on The Attempted Assassination of President Trump found that "law enforcement personnel with FirstNet cellular service did not have notable interference with their connectivity."² Public safety leaders praised

² <https://taskforce.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/july13taskforce.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/12-5-2024-Final-Report-Redacted.pdf>

the reliability with which FirstNet enabled reliable communication across agencies—demonstrating why no other network can match its resilience.³

These are just a few of the many instances where FirstNet has delivered for America's first responders. During these and other mutual aid events, FirstNet is the trusted platform that ensures reliable and interoperable communications under conditions where commercial networks have struggled.

National Events and Special Security

FirstNet has been used to support communications at large-scale national events—such as presidential inaugurations, Fourth of July celebrations, and major sporting events, like Super Bowls—where network congestion is a threat on commercial networks due to the voice and data traffic generated by large crowds. In those events, FirstNet's multi-level priority access and preemption, and the ability to further augment network capacity with deployable assets, ensured public safety agencies had uninterrupted coverage. And with the United States set to host numerous mass events like its 250th anniversary celebration, the 2026 FIFA World Cup, and the 2028 Summer Olympic games, Congress must not fail to reauthorize FirstNet before its expiration in early 2027 as a critical part of that preparation.

Innovation and Evolution

FirstNet has evolved beyond a legacy LTE network into a 5G-enabled architecture with advanced features. Some of the recent innovations and ongoing initiatives include:

- **Enhanced coverage**
FirstNet offers high-power user equipment (HPUE) solutions, for example, FirstNet MegaRange™ and SHIELD MegaFi routers operate on Band 14 and boost connectivity in challenging environments.
- **In-building Solutions:**
As a result of reinvestment by the FirstNet Authority, public safety agencies can receive FirstNet Cell Booster Pros – free of charge – to address in-building challenges and extend the reach of the FirstNet network within police stations, fire departments, and emergency operations centers.⁴
- **Network visibility tools**
FirstNet Central includes a Network Status Map, offering subscribers real-time insight into network status, wireless coverage, ongoing maintenance, and the locations of on-air deployables.

³ <https://www.cnn.com/2024/09/26/politics/house-hearing-trump-assassination-attempt#:~:text=In%20the%20minutes%20before%20Crooks,keep%20Trump%20safe%2C%20Moskowitz%20said.>

⁴ To date, more than 12,000 FirstNet Cell Booster Pros have been installed at the request of public safety across America.

- **Satellite direct-to-device testing**
AT&T and its partners (such as AST SpaceMobile) are conducting FirstNet trials of space-based connectivity with the goal to extend coverage directly to first responder devices in extremely remote locations.
- **Local control and dynamic priority allocation**
Incident commanders may dynamically assign priority to responder groups during events. This ensures the most critical teams maintain connectivity when needed.
- **FirstNet Fusion**
AT&T will soon launch FirstNet Fusion, which will enhance public safety communications and takes inter-carrier interoperability to a new level. Fusion combines critical communications capabilities like push-to-talk, dispatch and connected devices into one seamless experience, and will facilitate the ability to unite all first responders across jurisdictions, carriers, and technologies, whether that's during everyday emergencies, large-scale disasters or widely attended events that require cross-agency mutual aid coordination.

These innovations reflect the FirstNet public-private partnership's commitment to continuous improvement, future readiness, and responsiveness to first-responder's feedback and evolving needs.

Marketplace, Economic & Community Impact

FirstNet's success has helped create a dynamic public safety communications marketplace. Before FirstNet, the public safety communications ecosystem lacked innovation. First responders were beholden to one or two technology providers who often took their business for granted. Now, any public safety agency can choose to subscribe to FirstNet, Built with AT&T, Verizon's Frontline or T-Mobile's T-Priority services, among others. Public safety agencies choose FirstNet over alternative providers because it provides excellent service that meets their needs at a fiercely competitive price. In 2017, all 56 governors of U.S. states and territories opted into FirstNet. There was no federal mandate to do so, nor is any local, state or federal public safety organization mandated to subscribe to FirstNet or an alternative commercial provider. It is a matter of consumer choice in a competitive marketplace.

FirstNet is not just a technical infrastructure; it is a catalyst for broader economic and workforce gains. FirstNet's build-out has leveraged local labor, construction firms, and regional suppliers, driving regional economic activity in rural and urban communities. A 2024 economic impact study estimated that FirstNet deployment has generated nearly 14,000 jobs per year over seven

years and produced approximately \$5.6 billion in wages and salaries to date.⁵ The same study estimated \$8.0 billion in net economic output across industries tied to FirstNet's deployment.

These gains are fueled by AT&T's contracting strategy that supports veterans and a variety of business models in deployment, operations, and maintenance. In addition, the network is focused on serving all public safety by ensuring that traditionally underserved communities, like rural and tribal areas, now benefit from the same baseline of reliable communications. FirstNet has lowered barriers to entry for small, rural and resource-constrained agencies to have access to advanced broadband tools and reliable connectivity.

Oversight and Continuous Improvement

No large-scale infrastructure project is without challenges or opportunities for improvement. AT&T welcomes the rigorous oversight and accountability that the FirstNet program receives. Our performance is regularly evaluated by the FirstNet Authority, which provides ongoing feedback, while the GAO, and the Commerce Department's dedicated OIG conducts ongoing reviews and publicly releases its recommendations, which we take very seriously. FirstNet stands alone in the industry in subjecting itself to such rigorous and public oversight. In addition, we conduct internal assessments and gather valuable input from public safety stakeholders. By receiving feedback from these diverse sources and being held to formal contract requirements, both the oversight and program governance combine to drive continuous enhancements to the program and ensures FirstNet meets the evolving needs of public safety.

Conclusion

Congress' vision of a dedicated nationwide interoperable broadband infrastructure for first responders was bold and essential. Today, FirstNet is delivering on that vision. It is a living, evolving interoperable network that saves lives, empowers public safety agencies, and strengthens communities.

AT&T is honored to be the steward of this mission. We will continue to listen to public safety needs, expand coverage, drive innovation, and ensure FirstNet remains a trusted, future-proof platform for first responders well into the decades ahead.

AT&T appreciates the Committee's bipartisan attention to reauthorizing the FirstNet Authority, and we look forward to working closely with you to ensure swift enactment for this vital program.

⁵ https://www.forsmarsh.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Economic-Impact-of-FirstNet-RAN-Development_Executive-Summary.pdf ("FirstNet RAN development was associated with an increase of \$8.0 billion in net economic output across all industries and \$5.6 billion in total wages and salaries for workers and households across the country" (See Table 1); "Building the FirstNet RAN also created an average of 13,877 jobs per year over the 7-year period, with an estimated range of 103 to 28,460 jobs created per year" (See Table 2)).

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

We will now begin questioning, and I recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Sheriff Adkinson, in your opening statement, you mentioned there is a lack of clarity about defined roles throughout this program and that, quote, "When everyone is responsible, no one is accountable," end quote.

Can you speak a little more about what you mean by that, and can you give an example of some of the problems you have encountered?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Yes, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Let me give you some very specific examples.

The legislation did not contemplate an executive director. It left that open to interpretation. As such, we as the board of special governmental employees, whereas the executive director in this case is a senior manager—frankly, it could have been a private employee, it could have contracted, it could have been a political appointee. There are multiple iterations of that, but the reality is those folks are hired—vetted, hired, rated, disciplined by NTIA, right, and it should be in consultation with the board.

But I have personally witnessed when the board has given a directive that was not followed by the executive director. That is beyond problematic. Again, I am sitting up here answering for the accountability of someone else and I lack—so am I telling you, or am I asking you? And those are two fundamentally different—in my business, we say know your authority. The first thing you do is you know your authority. Those are two fundamentally different things.

It is my belief that that causes a situation where there is—unsure whether or not I will go to NTIA or I don't report to NTIA. No, no, I don't report to the board. We need to eliminate that.

It needs to be—from my standpoint, it needs to be clear that the board has the ability to hold someone accountable, at least the executive director, from a standpoint that—again, if the board says don't do this and it is a unanimous decision of this board, I am not familiar with any other board in this kind of situation that does not have that level of oversight.

Keep in mind—I will say again—you have three Cabinet-level officials that are represented on the FirstNet Authority Board. So there is direct oversight on the board, as well as we serve at the will and pleasure of the Secretary of Commerce. That is—and the inspector general is on top of that. So that is pretty direct oversight of the board.

It is in the authority and the mechanism itself, but I think we need to address that part of it.

Mr. HUDSON. That is very helpful. Thank you.

Mr. Dame, this draft legislation moves FirstNet directly under the leadership of NTIA. Some critics have claimed this will increase bureaucratic delays and diminish effectiveness of the network for public safety.

Are these claims accurate? And if not, can you explain how clarifying leadership roles will benefit this program?

Mr. DAME. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. NTIA has no interest in getting involved in the day-to-day operations of FirstNet Authority or its contractor, AT&T. In fact, we will always rely on the exper-

tise and public safety input of the board and the Public Safety Advisory Committee. Those strategic decisions made by the board need to be implemented by the staff of the FirstNet Authority.

Where NTIA and the Department of Commerce can excel is to support the implementation of those strategic decisions and provide performance accountability as it is being implemented and after the fact.

Mr. HUDSON. That makes sense.

Mr. Agnew, Hurricane Helene hit my home State of North Carolina, destroying a significant amount of telecommunications infrastructure, as you noted in your testimony.

Can you talk about the first 48 hours after an event like this, and what first actions does FirstNet take to restore service?

Mr. AGNEW. Yeah. First, we were significantly prepared and engaged with the State in the planning event because we knew the hurricane was coming and staged all across the State and the surrounding States to be prepared.

As I mentioned, we responded to 260 requests from public safety—specific to your State, 125 requests—partnering, imbedding with public safety, prioritizing where those deployables or mobile sites need to go. And then post-event, evaluating with public safety our response times and what incremental investments we need to make. And we fundamentally, post-Helene and Milton, made significant investments in our network disaster recovery capabilities for public safety so we can be prepared for the next event.

Mr. HUDSON. I appreciate that.

As my time seems to be expiring, as I have said before, if I don't hold myself accountable, Sheriff, I can't hold the rest of the committee accountable. So I will ask unanimous consent to insert in the record the documents, including the staff hearing documents list.

[The information appears at the conclusion of the hearing.]

Mr. HUDSON. And will now recognize the ranking member of the committee, the gentlelady from California, Ms. Matsui, for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Ms. MATSUI. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

FirstNet now connects more than 1,800 agencies and organizations across California, helping first responders communicate when every second counts. But too many communities still face cellular dead zones, especially in rural areas like the California Delta. And the FirstNet coverage maps don't always match what responders see on the ground. As we work to reauthorize FirstNet, we must make sure rural communities are fully covered and not left behind.

Mr. Agnew, what is AT&T committing to build next to help first responders reach the hardest-to-serve areas, and how much of that plan is new ground infrastructure like towers versus satellite-enabled coverage? And how will you prove that coverage exists where first responders actually work?

Mr. AGNEW. Thank you, Congresswoman. We have an excellent relationship with CAL FIRE, Cal OES, as you mentioned, and California Highway Patrol, and other jurisdictions in the State of California, and we continuously receive feedback. We build our network based off of public safety feedback.

But here is the advantage of this public-private partnership: AT&T builds out its corporate network as we determine, but because of all band priority and our investment, public safety benefits from that. And then, of course, there is the incremental FirstNet investment that has. And as I mentioned, there is \$8 billion happening, investing over the next 10 years. That \$8 billion is going to build approximately 3 to 4 thousand new towers, purpose-built towers based off the feedback of public safety.

There's been two workshops in your State, and they will continue to be in Sacramento and San Diego, where public safety can tell the FirstNet Authority exactly where those sites get built. And so we are building those sites for public safety, not because of profit or return on investment, and this is what is special and unique about the program.

Ms. MATSUI. OK. Thank you very much.

Mr. Dame, as Congress looks at reauthorizing FirstNet, how should we strengthen incentives and accountability for expanding coverage into rural and hard-to-serve areas? What specific metrics and reporting should Congress require to verify progress year to year?

Mr. DAME. Thank you, Ranking Member. I think NTIA believes strongly and the FirstNet Authority has been investing in only those areas where it is not—for additional coverage where it is not commercially profitable. That makes no sense. The market is going to solve the problems where it is commercially profitable. But public safety needs connectivity in those areas where there is not currently coverage. So FirstNet has been very good in its enhanced coverage to add in rural, Tribal lands, remote areas. It has been very focused on that.

In terms of the metrics, I believe the availability of the network and also the performance of the network will be the metrics that Congress should be looking at. We have all been at the edge of a cell site, and you have difficulty with throughput. We need to make sure that first responders don't encounter that same problem, because they do lifesaving work. It is not the same as when you and I are on a call or pushing data up or down.

Ms. MATSUI. Sure. Thank you.

FirstNet reauthorization is our chance to do two things at the same time: keep FirstNet nimble and build around public safety input while also strengthening oversight and accountability.

Sheriff Adkinson, you call for Congress to clarify the chain of command amongst NTIA FirstNet Board and FirstNet Authority.

Which decisions must remain fast and internal, and which are appropriate for NTIA approval because of longstanding challenges with contract oversight and performance?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Thank you, Ranking Member. I think there are a couple of things to consider. One, when it comes to the indication of where sites, towers, or technology, I think that is a public-safety-driven metric. That should be decided by public safety, where towers should go, what advances in technology.

And by way of example, I don't think any of us in here were talking about the Internet of Things 10 years ago. I think one of my firefighters would tell you now or one of my deputy sheriffs would say there is a body camera, there is a Taser Cam, there is an in-

car, there is a rocket, you know, or there are fire trucks. All of these are things we didn't even contemplate, you know, a decade ago.

Ms. MATSUI. Sure.

Sheriff ADKINSON. Those are the kind of decisions that should solely be indicated and driven forward by the board because that is your public safety expertise. And I don't think—I can say I don't think Mr. Dame would want to make a decision on where—what body camera, you know, data throughput we would be using.

So I think those are uniquely, with the advice of public safety, the input from the PSAC committee, where the board should stand out and make these decisions. What we say is there has to be an accountability factor to make sure that what is the actual will, again, of this board, is actually carried out.

Ms. MATSUI. OK.

Sheriff ADKINSON. I think that is critical.

Ms. MATSUI. Well, thank you very much. And I need to follow my chairman's lead and not overrun here.

I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

I now recognize the chairman of the full committee, Mr. Guthrie, for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. GUTHRIE. Thank you, Chair. Thanks for yielding, Mr. Hudson.

So first with Sheriff Adkinson, to kind of follow along what you were just saying. So the statute of limitations of the FirstNet network consists of network core and radio access network. So we are talking about how we didn't even discuss Internet of Things a decade ago.

How would you appropriately—how would appropriately expanding the definition of the network allow it to evolve with technological advancements?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Thank you for that question, Chair Guthrie.

I should have added by way of just full disclosure, if I could have been qualified as a network engineer, I wouldn't have been a cop.

So the reality of it is that a lot of this stuff is emerging. We know that Moore's Law gives us about 18 months prior to obsolescence, and in that we need the flexibility to engage what emerging technology is coming. Artificial intelligence is going to change the way we mandate and the way we deliver these services, and I think the board needs to be able to drive that, you know, where we can leverage technology to make these things better.

But crucially, if nothing else comes across, let me say this: Coverage is king, because before—we need to do one thing well before we try to do 10 other things. And so I think that is also—nothing about what I say should take away from the desire to continue expanding that. And we are not abandoning LMR, land mobile radio. That is a redundancy that is absolutely critical to what we do.

But specific to your question, we need the ability to engage new technology and invest in things that support coverage enhancement of the quality of the service we are delivering.

Mr. GUTHRIE. Thank you.

And so getting the coverage is so important. So, Mr. Agnew, I know in 2024 we had the AT&T outage. FirstNet customers were

notified of the outage 3 hours after it occurred, and the draft discussion is mandating 30 minutes to confirm.

Is that a reasonable timeline that you believe your company could comply with, and what other tools does AT&T provide FirstNet users to better understand outages?

Mr. AGNEW. Yeah. Thank you for that question, and thank you for your support of this public safety priority, Congressman.

Yes, we do think it is reasonable. We provide our first responders with what we call a network status tool that provides updates so they can know exactly what is going on. It was the world's first, where they can view on a map the performance of their network and if there are any impacts so that they can plan accordingly, as well as when it is going to be repaired. It is truly unprecedented transparency in public safety's network.

So, in short, Congressman, we do support a 30-minute notification.

Mr. GUTHRIE. OK. That is good.

And so, Mr. Dame, I will give you kind of a blanket question, but—so what will happen if this first responder network is not reauthorized?

Mr. DAME. Thank you, Chairman Guthrie. So I think we would run into a significant problem with, first, that there is—we need the certainty that the network would be reauthorized to make the network continue. But if it were not reauthorized by February 22, 2027, I believe you will not have an entity called the FirstNet Authority any longer, and the FCC would have to pull back the Band 14 license, which is the foundation of the contract with AT&T.

Mr. GUTHRIE. OK. So, Mr. Agnew, how would that affect you?

Mr. AGNEW. Well, we have a 25-year contract with the Government. We would continue to operate that contract and make a commitment. But to Mr. Dame's point, the spectrum would be in question, and so that is the importance of really reauthorizing FirstNet, which is to protect public safety spectrum so it can be on the network.

Mr. GUTHRIE. OK. Thanks.

And, Sheriff, would you just kind of, just for us, since this is 15 years ago, can you have just like your highlight incident of, wow, if we didn't have FirstNet in this instance—I know you have had hurricanes, you have had other things. My good friend from Florida tells me that.

Could you just kind of highlight a specific instance of, if we hadn't had FirstNet, this would have been a bigger disaster and we wouldn't have been able to communicate?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I could give you several, but I am going to stick with one, which was Hurricane Michael in 2019, as Representative Dunn knows very well. The ability to put deployable assets to bring cellular service back online was critical. It was something I personally witnessed. Previous to this, I was at Hurricane Katrina in 2005. I saw what happened when there is a fundamental collapse of communication.

So, yes, the short version is this is critical to the way we do business. My own agency went down and had to rely on FirstNet to dispatch calls.

Mr. GUTHRIE. Well, thank you. I appreciate that.

And my time has expired. I have 5 seconds, but I will yields those back. Thank you.

Mr. HUDSON. I appreciate that, Chairman.

I now recognize the ranking member of the full committee, Mr. Pallone, for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Mr. PALLONE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Obviously, FirstNet is essential for first responders, and we have to ensure that continues to be the case. Having said that, there is no shortage of evidence indicating a pattern of questionable decision making by the First Responder Network Authority leadership.

For instance, decisions to weaken contract requirements to allow milestone payments to be disbursed to the Authority's contractor raised serious questions about the value of the Authority's independence, especially if that independence does not produce the best outcomes for public safety end users.

So let me ask a couple of questions of the sheriff.

Do you believe, as I do, that a more direct line of authority between NTIA and the FirstNet Authority would help increase accountability in some of the instances covered across the inspector general reports?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I think that there are a couple of things here that I want to address, and I am going to bifurcate this.

First, when a decision by the board is not carried out by the executive director, you need to fire the executive director, right? And if the board is not carrying that out, you need to fire the board members. And so that is where I come down first.

Second part of that, it is in everyone's best interest for us to work well and closely with NTIA. I believe that is important for any level, any branch of government. But I start with accountability on this issue, and I think that is where there is a fundamental breakdown.

If you are going to have accountability, you have to have authority to make decisions, and if they didn't do it, then that is who should be held accountable. But I do believe in the cooperation and relationship with NTIA.

Mr. PALLONE. All right. Now, you know, I believe Congress can maintain the important role to the FirstNet Board and still preserve the FirstNet Authority's autonomy, if you will, which is important to act with speed and precision, but then also tighten up some loose ends to ensure investments are put to the best possible use.

So, again, Sheriff, do you agree that we can achieve all these goals in this legislation, and what should the committee keep in mind as they think about these roles and responsibilities working well together towards a shared goal?

And, again, that is, you know, the role of the FirstNet Board, the operational autonomy, and tightening up some of these loose ends that keep coming up.

Sheriff ADKINSON. So I told him I would give him authorship credit, but Mr. Dame said something the other day that I really liked, which is this idea of an elegant solution. The reality of it is that public safety has to drive where these investments go. I don't see it functioning otherwise. I see it being problematic.

I think there should be a close working relationship with NTIA. I think there are opportunities for this Congress to address lack of continuity in the way we have come on board, in the way we are doing business. So for sure I think that is something that matters.

I don't think any of these things should work in a vacuum, but when it comes to making decisions on the financial—and I don't think NTIA has ever suggested that they should determine where a tower goes or anything of that nature. So I think that is a good place for us to come down, is that the decisions on the financial placement of towers and things like that resides with the board and should maintain that in a public safety mindset. And it is my belief that when it comes to at least someone that the board can have some direct say and control over should be the executive director.

Mr. PALLONE. OK. Now, much of the conversation about reauthorizing the FirstNet has rightly focused on the goal of interoperability—interoperability for first responders coming from different departments or agencies at various levels of government.

So I was going to ask, Mr. Agnew, if you could talk about the work being done on the Fusion application, how it could address some cross-network barriers that exist from push to talk and other mission critical capabilities. You have about a minute.

Mr. AGNEW. Thank you, Congressman Pallone, and thank you for your support of the FirstNet program since inception.

The network is inherently interoperable today. That is the foundation, as you laid out, in the initial act.

From integration and interoperability with legacy, land mobile radio, or walkie-talkie solutions, FirstNet Fusion is going to make that even easier. Cross-carrier, cross-technology, cross-network. It puts it in the cloud. It makes it more affordable. It makes it more scalable. It makes it easier to implement. It just makes it easier for public safety to use the technology. It is coming in the next few months, and we are going to continue to advance Next Generation interoperability.

Mr. PALLONE. And you are talking about the Fusion application?

Mr. AGNEW. The Fusion. That is right.

Mr. PALLONE. All right. All right, thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ALLEN [presiding]. I thank the ranking member for yielding. And now that I have the chair, I am going to call on myself for my line of questioning.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I learned 2 years ago just how important the ability to communicate during an emergency or natural disaster can be when Hurricane Helene tore through my district. I will never forget the first press conference with the Governor and the State director, and the first question the State director got was, "Where can people find out where we have shelter, food, and water?" And he said, "Go to our website." We had no internet. I realized then Congress has got to do something.

Since its inception, FirstNet has been an important resource for law enforcement and first responders in times like this, and considering its reauthorization gives us an opportunity to examine its effectiveness and transparency.

Mr. Agnew, I know FirstNet works as quickly as possible to restore connectivity, but can you walk me through how we are going to prevent these interruptions in the future and maybe use satellites and other redundancies so emergency responders can communicate effectively following a major disaster?

Mr. AGNEW. Thank you, Congressman, for that question. So first, you start with the foundationally strong, hardened, network-dedicated core to have the highest reliability network you can, but then you have to add layers on top of that.

FirstNet, as you mentioned, with the Response Operations Group, have dedicated deployables or mobile cell sites that public safety can call out at any moment's notice. So if there is a challenge, it can be rectified quickly.

We also provide equipment, first of its kind, first in this world, High Power User Equipment, also known as MegaRange. Six times more powerful than a cell phone. So it can extend farther coverage using that technology.

And you mentioned satellite. It is going to be important. That is the next layer of being able to provide coverage either in white space or particularly if coverage has been compromised. We partner with many satellite companies: Inmarsat, AST, and Starlink. We have partnered specifically on direct-to-cellular capability with AST to deliver FirstNet service, like they say in the sky, and so to provide that hardened redundancy. So think of FirstNet network as a layered network.

Mr. ALLEN. Good. Thank you.

Mr. Dame, can you describe the current government structure of the FirstNet Authority and how NTIA ensures its board's actions align with statutory requirements and public safety promises and priorities?

Mr. DAME. Thank you, Vice Chairman. Under the current law, unfortunately, it is confusing as to different reporting lines, as it has been discussed in our various statements, but we defer very closely to the board in making strategic decisions about technology roadmaps, budget decisions, reinvestments. And they receive that input themselves from the Public Safety Advisory Committee and across all the public safety groups and the stakeholders.

And we are going to continue, as the draft bill suggests, to ensure that the strategic decisions continue to occur if Congress decides to reauthorize FirstNet and include the draft bill provisions.

Mr. ALLEN. Thank you.

Mr. Agnew, most of us are familiar with how government contracts work. As I understand it, AT&T's contract with FirstNet Authority is somewhat unique.

Can you walk us through and explain how you support the provision in this bill to submit the contract to Congress upon request?

Mr. AGNEW. NTIA has made that available to the House E&C, and we will make it available. So we fully support the transparency. We fully support the oversight and will continue to do so.

Mr. ALLEN. Good. Thank you.

Well, Sheriff, I don't want to leave you out.

Do you have everything you need to deal with disasters? And what does Congress need to do to fix that?

Sheriff ADKINSON. You know, I want to say this in a manner that somewhat makes sense. It is not the perfection. We don't have perfection there, right, but there is a beauty in the effort of perfection. And what I mean by that is we are getting there.

I think Congress has been incredibly supportive. I think the fee-based system has worked well from that. We continue to grow, but there is a lot of work that needs to be done for this to be done correctly, and ongoing work. But I appreciate the congressional support.

Mr. ALLEN. Yes, sir. Well, thank you. And I thank the witnesses again.

And now I yield my time, and I call on Representative Soto for his line of questioning.

Mr. SOTO. Thank you so much, Chairman.

During hurricanes, flooding, fires, even recent freezes—if you can believe it, in Central Florida—reliable communication is critical for our brave first responders to save lives.

Congress stepped up, creating FirstNet with the spectrum sale proceeds, and we had an audacious goal, which is ensuring every community, no matter how rural, urban, or otherwise, has access to dependable communications. Every American deserves that protection.

I contacted some of our local Central Florida agencies and see that both the Osceola Emergency Management Department, city of Kissimmee, city of St. Cloud, Osceola Sheriff's Office, several cities in Polk County, as well as Polk County Sheriff utilize these services.

And hearing from my local emergency management director in Osceola, Bill Litton, he said, yes, emergency management uses FirstNet for our cell phone providers. We have had good experience with the service and the resources from FirstNet, that they can provide our county pre- and postdisaster. And he noted that last year FirstNet has added two additional towers in the area to improve reliability in service areas.

We also heard from Polk County that the overall feedback has been positive. Biggest improvement noted has been in areas where LT boosters have been installed, with better coverage and performance reported in those locations.

We also got a great feedback from Hurricane Milton as well with more than 30 FirstNet emergency support requests from public safety in Florida.

Sheriff Adkinson, thanks for being here. I know you talked a little bit about Hurricane Michael already. You know, a day after Hurricane Michael, I had texted Dr. Dunn to see how he was doing, and he got that text 4 months later and was like, "Why are you texting me now?"

You said your own internal network had gone down. Why do you think FirstNet held up during Hurricane Michael while a lot of the civilian and local law enforcement networks went down?

Knowing that categ—Hurricane Michael went from a Cat 1 to a Cat 5 in one day, why did FirstNet, you think, hold up?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I think it was a question of volume of resources, right, the ability to put resources onsite, so even when they went down or any—listen, any system can fail. The ability to

respond immediately and to have the assets, I think, was critical in being successful there. I think that is why.

You know, I think, as we were, as you said, looking for members of our local government as well as every other citizen at Hurricane Michael to try to assist, we were able to get these deployables in to make a difference and to boost that cell signal.

So at the end of the day, I think it is just an economy of scale that makes the most system—it is the redundancy. It is the resiliency of the system. The analogy for me, again, is still the Eisenhower interstate system. There may be better roads, but you can count on the interstate being there.

Mr. SOTO. Mr. Agnew, you know, you mentioned some pretty big investment goals: \$14 billion invested so far, \$40 billion in total. Can you walk me through a little more on what that entails?

New towers, I know, was a key part, satellite redundancy. Can you give us a more clear picture of some of those investments?

Mr. AGNEW. I think you are exactly right; it is going to be investment-significant in coverage—rural areas, underserved areas, Tribal areas.

Just alone in your district, 35 sites have been invested in. You had one site last year, you have more coming. You have three more coming this year—

Mr. SOTO. Keep them coming.

Mr. AGNEW [continuing]. Based off of the feedback—

Mr. SOTO. We have hurricanes in central Florida.

Mr. AGNEW [continuing]. from your first responders.

Hardening of the network; generators; continuing to expand, as the sheriff mentioned, deployables and mobile cell sites that need to respond quickly.

We have to be prepared for every disaster. We have signed up for this oversight. No provider has this oversight. We have to answer the call, and we have to continuously improve.

So that investment is going to go—as well as the core. So it is significant technical investment to make sure public safety can communicate in the worst possible times.

Mr. SOTO. And that is why that reauthorization before expiration is so critical, right? So you all can continue these investments—

Mr. AGNEW. Right.

Mr. SOTO [continuing]. Uninterrupted, in areas like ours, where we get natural disasters on occasion.

Mr. AGNEW. Absolutely.

Mr. SOTO. Thanks.

I yield back.

Mr. ALLEN. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

And now I call on Mr. Bilirakis from Florida—

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Thank you very much.

Mr. ALLEN [continuing]. For his line of questioning.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Appreciate it very much. Thank you.

As a former member of the Homeland Security Committee, ensuring first responders have the necessary tools and resources they need to respond to emergencies has been a high priority of mine since coming to Congress.

In fact, I chaired a hearing on this very topic in 2012 on the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Commu-

nications. I know well how fragmented and clumsy public safety communications were 14 years ago. From that hearing, FirstNet was ultimately born, and I think it has been very successful.

Sheriff Adkinson, can you talk about the relationship that the FirstNet Authority Board has with the FirstNet executive director? And what is the process if there is a disagreement between the two of them? I think that is very important.

Sheriff ADKINSON. Just a point of clarification. Relationship between what two entities? I missed that.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Oh, OK. All right. So, again, the process—can you talk about the relationship that the FirstNet Authority Board has with the FirstNet executive director, and what is the process if there is a disagreement between them?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Sure.

Just as a point of clarification again, the executive director is vetted, hired, rated by the NTIA. Now, that should be in consultation with the Board, and so we always encourage that to happen as well.

And no reflection on the current executive director, but I think when you will go back and look at it, that has been at the heart of what some of these issues are, if you look at these OIG reports, is the relationship between or the inability to hold accountable.

So I just think it is critical for us to have that authority to do that. They are technically an NTIA employee, as I understand it, under the law. They are a select senior management employee. They are not an employee of the Board—or, the executive director is not an employee of the FirstNet Board.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. OK. So, if there is a disagreement, who prevails?

Sheriff ADKINSON. NTIA. I mean, they are ultimately who would—I mean, we would have to reach out to NTIA and say that we had an issue or a disagreement with them—which would put them, by the way, in a very unique position, because they don't supervise him, per se, every day.

So, if he decided, for instance—again, if he said, "I won't carry out this order, executive order, or vote of the Board," you know, the situation would be I would have to call and ask for NTIA's assistance to make him comply with the request of the Board.

So I am asking, not telling, at that point.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. OK. Thank you.

Mr. Agnew, can you walk me through the AT&T decided—again, why they decided to take the risk to create this network, especially in light of the fact that previous State-run systems didn't work out so well?

Mr. AGNEW. Yeah. AT&T has a history of working with public safety. We helped develop 9-1-1 in the late 1960s. We invest and we are the market leader in public safety answering points. It was natural. It was natural because when you invest in public safety, they invest in you back.

Now, we had a tremendous amount of risk. We did not know if States would all opt in. There is no mandate to adopt this network, so we didn't know public safety would come. And we are signing up for a huge contract with a tremendous amount of oversight that is unprecedented, where we have to meet 36 requirements, thousands of reports that can continue to evolve.

So there was a tremendous amount of risk. But we thought, if we invest and partner with public safety, that we can run a good business. And while I was nervous when we launched the network in September of 2017—we got our first subscriber from Fairfax County, Virginia, second subscriber from Casper, Wyoming—we realized it would work. And now we are here with a very successful network that public safety relies on every day.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. We appreciate that.

OK. Again, a followup question for Mr. Agnew.

Can you briefly explain the current public safety communications marketplace and how it has changed in the past 14 years?

And what problem has FirstNet solved, and what are areas that still need to be addressed?

Mr. AGNEW. Yeah. I will just—

Mr. BILIRAKIS. I know that is a lot, and we only have a few seconds.

Mr. AGNEW [continuing]. Be brief.

FirstNet was the catalyst. Public safety was an underserved community that was ignored. It was just offered best-effort service. FirstNet puts public safety at the top.

FirstNet is needed to continue on, because you need that catalyst for the next decades to come to make sure public safety is paid attention to.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. All right. Thank you.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman. Appreciate it.

Mr. ALLEN. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

And now I call on Representative Clarke for her line of questioning.

Ms. CLARKE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning. Let me thank Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Pallone, Ranking Member Matsui for holding this hearing.

And thank you to our panel of witnesses for joining us today.

Let me also extend my gratitude to Congresswoman McClellan and Congressman Dunn for their work in putting together a good-faith, bipartisan bill to reauthorize this critical public safety program.

As a New Yorker and a former member of the New York City Council who took office in January of 2002, mere months after the devastating attacks of September 11th, this issue is truly personal for me. I know all too well the importance of strong public safety communications networks.

Our first responders are on the front lines in responding to terrorist attacks, hurricanes, wildfires, earthquakes, and other natural disasters. We owe it to them to provide a reliable communications network free from interference in times of crisis when they are putting their lives on the line to save others.

The firefighters, police, and other first responders to the 9/11 attacks dealt with communications failures that undermined their ability to coordinate rescue/recovery efforts in a way that must never happen again.

From that great tragedy and the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission, the First Responder Network Authority was born. Since its launch in 2017, FirstNet has been adopted in all 50 States, the District of Columbia, and 6 territories. Billions have

been spent building out the network to cover nearly 3 million square miles, and first responders across the country now use the network to enhance communications and leverage data capabilities.

The success of FirstNet has also sparked competition in the market, inspiring other carriers, such as T-Mobile and Verizon, to create their own products that are now successfully serving public safety subscribers. This has been a win-win for the industry and the public safety community at large.

While no government program is perfect, it is clear that FirstNet has been wildly successful, and it is critical that we move forward with legislation that preserves FirstNet's authority to operate beyond the upcoming sunset date.

As with any program, proper oversight is critical to ensuring accountability. And I am confident that this committee can find a path forward that allows us in Congress to move with haste towards the reauthorization necessary to provide certainty to the public safety community while also ensuring that any concerns raised by the Office of the Inspector General and Government Accountability Office are also addressed adequately.

My question is to you, Sheriff Adkinson. In your view, does FirstNet Authority currently have sufficient personnel resources to implement the corrective actions or improvements identified in recent inspector general reports?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I think we would be well-served to increase our field operations in regard to outreach at the local agencies, right? Because we ultimately have to rely on our public safety professionals to say, "Is this working? Where are there shortcomings?"

So I think there is opportunity to increase there. I like the idea of adding things like a strategic office to be looking forward to the future to understand what we need to be doing.

So there are a couple of areas where I think it is appropriate to expand, but there may be appropriate areas to contract, as well, too. One does not necessarily mean adding others.

But I do believe, from an area of accountability, we are not served well if we are not out meeting with the men and women of public safety all across the country.

And I would point out, when we make decisions on—let's just say we were going to expand to a Tribal area. That is not commercially viable for AT&T in some times. But I am not in the business of worrying what is commercially viable for them. I am in the business of making sure this gets done and serves the citizen. That is what the Board is about. So I think—

Ms. CLARKE. Very well.

Sheriff ADKINSON [continuing]. We are working that way.

Ms. CLARKE. Very well.

Can you explain why it is so important for the Board of FirstNet to have a role free from outside interference? And what does that mean specifically for reinvestment and public safety representation? Do you believe the Board can continue to do its work while also working collaboratively with the NTIA for the benefit of first responders?

Sheriff ADKINSON. First of all, I fundamentally believe that there is no reason that anyone can't work collaboratively inside. We all have the same bosses, right? At the end of the day, that is the citi-

zens we serve. And we are stewards of the citizens' trust and money. And I realize these are fee-based, but let me be clear: It is the public's money, in my opinion, and we have that responsibility.

I think we can work collaboratively toward that. I think what is crucial is that no interference be made in the way funds are expended to enhance public safety. That would be problematic. I haven't actually heard that suggested, so I want to be clear. But that would be problematic for me. I think it would be problematic for public safety at large and—but that hasn't happened, and I don't believe that that will happen.

If it did, I think that would be something the Board would have an absolute moral responsibility to stand up and say so.

Ms. CLARKE. Thank you.

I have run out of time. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. ALLEN. I thank the gentlelady for yielding.

And now I call on Dr. Dunn for your questions, 5 minutes.

Mr. DUNN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And, Sheriff Adkinson, thank you for being here today. I know it is hard to leave Florida, it is so beautiful.

I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan bill, the First Responder Network Reauthorization Act. And I thank Representative Jennifer McClellan for her colead on this.

Jennifer, thank you. This is a great bill.

When Congress created the First Responder Network Authority, there was a clear mandate to have a public safety preempted network that would be used exclusively for first responders on the ground. Interestingly, this also includes Members of Congress and even the Senate.

Our Nation's heroes and public servants who are the first to respond and the first people to put their lives on the line to protect Americans need robust communications. It was a very clear mandate to give our local communities the resources they need to respond to tragedies.

And what we have seen since 2017 when the contract was awarded has been a tremendous success story. We have also learned some lessons, that our job in Congress as enforcers and oversight of the program is critical. And that includes contract transparency and maintaining accountability at all levels, so I thank Chairman Sheriff Adkinson for emphasizing that.

FirstNet is imperative to the Florida Panhandle before, during, and after disasters. Our district knows all too well the effects of hurricanes and tropical storms in our communities. We have been hit by 4 major hurricanes in the last 8 years. We are still rebuilding and recovering from Hurricane Michael.

Mr. Agnew, first question: FirstNet was directed to provide nationwide interoperability. Briefly, what steps have you taken to solve the interoperability issue to ensure agencies using other carriers can still communicate during emergencies?

Mr. AGNEW. Thank you, Congressman, and thank you for your support of this legislation.

FirstNet is interoperable, let me be clear. It was designed to be interoperable from the ground up. Data, voice, text message—you can work amongst commercial carriers.

The next phase of interoperability is ensuring that land mobile radios or walkie-talkies—those legacy radio systems—are interoperable. And so that is—when I had mentioned earlier, FirstNet Fusion is going to allow for that to be more seamless and easier to use.

Mr. DUNN. So I like to think that we have solved the confusion of interoperability here. I mean, interoperability means everybody can operate on it, right?

Mr. AGNEW. That—interoperability means we can—

Mr. DUNN. I didn't think we needed a dictionary on that.

Mr. AGNEW [continuing]. Talk amongst each other, right?

Mr. DUNN. Sheriff Adkinson—Chairman Adkinson, thank you for your service.

You stated, as Board chair, the roles and responsibilities of NTIA, the Board, and the Authority are not well-defined in statute. When everybody is held responsible, nobody is responsible, all right?

And, Mr. Dame, you had a similar statement as well.

Sheriff, in your opinion, how should Congress clarify this statute?

And, Mr. Dame, I want you to answer afterwards.

Sheriff ADKINSON. So, you know, that is tyranny of the commons, right? It becomes everybody's responsibility when it is no one's.

You know, when we first came on the Board, there was some reticence to give the Board members access to information that we believed was fundamentally necessary to do that. Now, we were able to ultimately achieve that, but there should be no hesitation. When it comes to an executive director, when a Board asks for information—i.e., the contract, i.e., discussions about what agencies are on the—the only answer, acceptable answer, is yes. And so, when it is not, we have got a problem.

And so I believe fundamentally that, again, if I am going to sit at this table and answer for the conduct of that, then I should have the authority to make decisions on who that person is and whether or not they are performing their job.

Mr. DUNN. Thank you for that.

Mr. Dame, briefly. We are running out of time.

Mr. DAME. Yep.

NTIA agrees with what Sheriff Adkinson is describing, in that the Board is of paramount importance, along with the Public Safety Advisory Committee. They should still be making strategic decisions about reinvestments and strategic roadmaps, and NTIA can help with the implementation and performance accountability.

Mr. DUNN. Well, I would like to think this bill will help you with that.

And in the last few seconds we have, are there local, Federal, or permitting requirements that have inhibited FirstNet's tower deployment in rural areas?

Mr. Dame?

Mr. DAME. I think you might want to get Mr. Agnew's input, sir.

Mr. DUNN. Mr. Agnew?

Mr. AGNEW. Allowing—changing permitting to make public safety towers to be built more quickly would help the public safety network.

Mr. DUNN. All right. Well, please keep us informed.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. My time has expired, and I yield back.

Mr. ALLEN. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

And now I would call on Representative Ruiz for your line of questioning.

Mr. RUIZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I represent California's 25th District, which includes desert, rural communities, Tribal lands, agricultural regions, and some of the country's most extreme weather, extreme heat conditions, in the southeast corner of California. In the Coachella and Imperial Valley, summer temperatures routinely exceed 110 degrees Fahrenheit for days, even weeks, and at times reaches up to 130, straining power and communication systems. Frequent dust storms, sometimes multiple times a month, reduce visibility and damage critical equipment with little warning.

First responders operate far from major infrastructure during wildfires, dust storms, power shutoffs, and prolonged extreme heat that pushes both people and systems to their limits. For these communities, reliable emergency communications are not a convenience, they are lifesaving.

That is why reauthorizing the First Responder Network Authority, or FirstNet, is so important. FirstNet ensures that, when everything else fails, first responders can still communicate.

This bill recognizes that FirstNet is no longer an experiment but critical national infrastructure that must be governed, monitored, and strengthened. I appreciate that it reauthorizes FirstNet through 2037, providing long-term stability while focusing on reliability, transparency, and equity.

And reliability is my first concern. Extreme heat and frequent dust storms place constant stress on communication systems, power outages last longer, equipment fails more often, and response times stretch.

So, Mr. Agnew, in areas like mine facing extreme heat, dust storms, and wildfires, how does FirstNet keep service running during extended power outages and equipment strain?

Mr. AGNEW. Yeah. Thank you for that question.

We continue to harden the site generators using our deployable program when there is a problem that comes out. We—

Mr. RUIZ. How long does it take to send—you said “deployable.” How long does it take to send generators, and how close are those generators to the southeast corner of California?

Mr. AGNEW. We can get the specific locations to your district of how far. But we stage our generators, stage our deployables within access to get to first responders quickly. We have requirements to execute that per the contract to meet delivery of those.

Mr. RUIZ. OK.

This bill takes important steps by requiring regular business continuity and disaster recovery plans subject to Federal approval. This matters because failures during wildfires, dust storms, or outages put lives at risk. And we need to know how quickly FirstNet recovers and whether service is available for rural and Tribal communities, not just big cities.

So transparency is my next concern. Responders need real-time, accurate information. This bill's outage notification and status tool

requirements are a meaningful improvement, but transparency only works if the information is timely and accessible during an active emergency.

Mr. Agnew, again, when an outage occurs, how quickly does that information reach first responders in the field, not just agency leadership?

Mr. AGNEW. Right. So we are working, continuing to evolve that communication step. As we mentioned, the network status tool provides information in near-realtime so leadership and individuals in public safety can make decisions quickly.

Ensuring that communication gets down to the working level, we are continuing to work with public safety. There is an opportunity for users to actually sign up on notifications via text and via email. And so it is a continual educational process that we have to do.

But we acknowledge, more communication. The tools are there, though. It has already been built.

Mr. RUIZ. OK.

Sheriff Adkinson, are outage notifications reaching first responders quickly enough?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I don't think it is ever quick enough unless it is instantaneous, right? We seek—again, we go back—we seek for the perfection. But I think it is getting there very, very quickly.

Is there room for improvement? I think there is always room for improvement. Instantaneous would be the only acceptable answer. Everything else requires improvement.

Mr. RUIZ. And so what accountability measures exist if outage notifications are delayed or incomplete?

Sheriff ADKINSON. So a couple of things.

One, we are typically able to notify fairly quickly. When I say "fairly quickly," I mean in a matter of 10 to 15 minutes based on, you know, what the availability and what the area of outage is.

But I would add to that that we as a board are starting to develop key performance indexes that we wanted to put in place as measurables so that AT&T can give us direct response into things that we think are important past what has been done in the past.

So this is part of this idea of we need more accountability, more metrics to show. That is something the Board is going to do. We are already looking at that. And I think that is critically important to make sure we are getting our money's worth out of it.

Mr. RUIZ. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mr. ALLEN. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

And now I call on Representative Pfluger from the great State of Texas for your questions.

Mr. PFLUGER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Appreciate the witnesses for being here, and a very important conversation that we are having. It is obviously important to Texas after the flooding of last July, and that is, you know, one of the many examples I think we can point to of why FirstNet is so critically important.

And my perspective will come, kind of, from the—not just the Energy and Commerce lane but also from the Homeland Security perspective as well.

So I will start with Mr. Agnew.

And thank you for being here.

I want to talk about just assessing who is on the network, assessing which local and State partners have access.

And, you know, if we wanted to know which folks in our area were currently accessed, how does that work? And if we don't have all the information, then what do we need to do, either via statute or some other means, to know that information?

Mr. AGNEW. We appreciate that question. And we continue to work with first responders to allow us to communicate who is on the network. We understand it is so important from a mutual-aid perspective, defining "mutual aid" as when one county goes to another county to support.

And we are working with the Authority for a process to more seamlessly get the approvals from each of the public safety agencies to say, "Yes, you can use my name." Right now, there are restrictions for our ability to do that through the FCC proprietary network information, but we are working collaboratively with the Authority to make sure that will happen.

It is so important for public safety to know that they are on the network, so we see the value in it.

Mr. PFLUGER. Do you think that is something in the reauthorization that we need to add to the statute provisions, which is kind of a transparency piece of who is on?

Mr. AGNEW. Because I think—because both AT&T and the FirstNet Authority are in agreement that this needs to be done, I don't think it is necessary to add it in, but it is something that we are working on.

Mr. PFLUGER. OK. Yeah, we will continue to look at that, because I think that is key. And, you know, just knowing who is on the net—

Mr. AGNEW. Right.

Mr. PFLUGER [continuing]. Who is, you know—as a fighter pilot, it is like, who is on?

Mr. AGNEW. That is right.

Mr. PFLUGER. And who are we talking to?

Mr. AGNEW. That is right.

Mr. PFLUGER. And who is not on, more importantly.

Mr. AGNEW. Right.

Mr. PFLUGER. So thank you for that.

I represent AST in Midland, Texas, and proud of the work that they are doing to deliver, you know, another domain of connectivity. And I think that that layer helps in remote areas, especially like we experienced during the flooding.

I think the Senate held a hearing, and the relationship with AT&T and AST was raised last week. So I would love to hear, you know, any details that you are willing to talk to us about with that relationship and how it relates to FirstNet and, you know, another layer of connectivity.

Mr. AGNEW. Yeah. Thank you for that question, Congressman.

The beauty of this public-private partnership is, when AT&T makes an investment, a FirstNet user takes advantage of it. And so the investment that actually is being made in AST is AT&T.

Now, my group works back with AT&T, and we ensure that anything that is deployed from AT&T meets the needs of first respond-

ers. So when AST goes up, when it fully launches, it will be for first responders, a version. It will have priority, preemption. We talk about push-to-talk, mission critical. It will go well beyond texting.

And we are excited. We are going to open—at the end of this month, we are going to open up customers signing up for trials specific to public safety, and it is going to launch first with public safety customers, specifically FirstNet customers.

And we are more than happy to talk to any Member in detail about specifically what the service will offer.

Mr. PFLUGER. That is fantastic. It is another domain, especially in rural America, that will help provide that connectivity.

Sheriff, thank you for your service. I was stationed at Tyndall Air Force Base, just to the east of you, for many years, and want to talk about a couple of things.

The relationship between the FirstNet CEO, the Board, and NTIA—my understanding is that the Board and the chair provide recommendations and strategic guidance to the CEO, but those are not necessarily binding. And, in practice, this could mean that the CEO doesn't necessarily have to, you know, follow some of the recommendations.

A, is that accurate? And, then, in your time as Board chair, have there been instances where recommendations maybe didn't necessarily get to the goal line?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I think because the position of chief executive—or, the position of executive director wasn't originally contemplated and it left that ambiguity, that the executive director can—and, quite frankly, in the past has—again, directly went against what was the will of the Board.

I will be specific. There was a multimillion-dollar task order, which we said—now, I want to be clear, not the current executive director—but that we said—we, as the Board—based on an executive order from the President of the United States that we considered to be binding to FirstNet, should not have been signed. That was against the will of the Board. Whatever rationale, whatever reason that was, it just didn't—it didn't work for us.

Mr. PFLUGER. Thank you.

My time has expired.

AT&T, thank you for taking the initiative on this and fielding something that is super-important.

I yield back.

Mr. ALLEN. I thank the gentleman for yielding.

And now I call on Representative Peters for your questions.

Mr. PETERS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

In Congress we have the responsibility to enable our first responders to make the best decisions to keep our communities safe through natural disasters and other emergency events. The First Responder Network Authority was created in 2012 to oversee Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network in support of this goal.

First responders like San Diego Police Department and San Diego Fire and Rescue in my district use the FirstNet network, which provides them with coverage throughout the region as well as a guarantee of priority and preemption services in the case of heavy congestion and use.

In addition to using FirstNet services in case of disasters, San Diego's first responders also use FirstNet deployable assets for planned events that strain our local network.

Last summer, first responders in San Diego had the opportunity to meet with FirstNet representatives to discuss ongoing concerns and opportunities for improvement, like dead zones in areas with poor connections.

Sheriff Adkinson, I want to just say first to you and to everyone, thank you for that engagement.

How do you engage with and respond to coverage concerns from the first responder on the ground?

And, Sheriff, are there any particular themes you hear out of those meetings?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Thank you for that question. It is actually a very relevant question because the Authority has carried out coverage and enhancement workshops across the country—we are just wrapping some of those up now—where we meet with the members of that community and say, “Where are our shortcomings?”

And then we get a priority list from them that says, “This is where we believe we need assistance, where things need to be improved.” It is a big list. It is a big country—

Mr. PETERS. Have you seen particular major themes come across that, or—

Sheriff ADKINSON. For sure. I think there are two things that come almost immediately.

Obviously, your rural areas are underserved, and that is part of our emphasis.

The other thing is, when we are talking about inside of buildings and things of that nature where we have infrastructure problems, that we need to straighten it—

Mr. PETERS. OK.

Sheriff ADKINSON [continuing]. That we need to strengthen that.

So those two things are pretty unanimous, that, you know, where we have these difficult terrains—

Mr. PETERS. All right.

Sheriff ADKINSON [continuing]. Or the buildings themselves sometimes become problematic.

But that is how we identify. We have to meet with these people to identify it.

Mr. PETERS. Great. Thank you.

So my district is not rural. It is mostly urban and suburban. We have fewer issues with coverage. We have more struggles with capacity. There are communities that lack coverage, leaving the public safety community without the tools to coordinate and communicate with others in times of emergency.

So it might be difficult to balance those needs, but I wonder, what insight can you give me on how you make your reinvestment decisions? How do you balance capacity, the ability to serve—the quantity, versus coverage?

Sheriff ADKINSON. We rely very heavily on our Public Safety Advocacy Committee and what the locals there in those communities say.

So, again, the issue is always going to be, we are looking at what New Hampshire needs, we look at what California needs, we look

at what Michigan needs, and then try to make the best educated decision to say, "This is the priority list."

But that almost is fundamentally based on where the most immediate needs are at, and there are a lot of competing needs. To your point, in a city—you know, I have spent a lot of time in Florida's capital, in Tallahassee, and there were times that we were struggling inside the Department of Law Enforcement's building. Well, Department of Law Enforcement needs to be able to speak on FirstNet, right? They are on it. So we got in there and we got this resolved.

Mr. PETERS. Right.

Sheriff ADKINSON. But it is a modern building in a modern city.

So it is very difficult. We just try to prioritize based on what is the most pressing need.

Mr. PETERS. Those decisions are made regionally?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Pardon?

Mr. PETERS. Region by region?

Sheriff ADKINSON. They are made by State, and then the Board, at the advice of the—with the PSAC, the Public Safety Advocacy Committee—

Mr. PETERS. OK.

Sheriff ADKINSON [continuing]. Kind of forms the teams and say, "OK, this is the way we are going to do it." But it doesn't necessarily—it could all be in one particular area if that was the most pressing need.

Mr. PETERS. I have a sense of how we would respond to the coverage issues in the rural areas, but maybe I could follow up with you on, what about buildings? What are the kinds of things we should look forward to hearing about in terms of trying to solve coverage and accessibility within buildings?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Absolutely critical. As I said, we were struggling with coverage inside the Department of Law Enforcement building. We recently resolved the Louisiana State Police's problem at their training ground. And we have to be aware, we have to know that is going on and then try to prioritize that.

But buildings, we just did one in Tarrant County, Texas—the same thing. In a skyscraper we had this problem.

So these are things that's really of equal footing. We think traditional towers and satellites and things like that. Sometimes it is bidirectional antenna. Sometimes it is strengthening. A lot of different avenues to get there.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. Agnew, I will give you an opportunity to respond to that as well.

Mr. AGNEW. Yeah. Thank you for the question.

In urban areas, the sheriff is right, in-building. But we have developed what we call Cell Booster Pros, FirstNet Band 14-capable devices. We have instituted it in thousands of buildings. So, during the coverage workshop, that process occurs.

So it is not just your macro—

Mr. PETERS. Right.

Mr. AGNEW [continuing]. It is your in-buildings. So we are deploying technologies to help that in-building area.

Mr. PETERS. OK. Thank you.

It is an important program. Thank you all for your work.

And I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON [presiding]. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Griffith, for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. GRIFFITH. Thank you very much.

I had similar questions to my colleague from California, on the other side of that coin. I represent a large, mountainous, rural district.

So, Sheriff Adkinson, I am coming to you. And you touched on some of it in your opening and in your comments to Representative Peters.

But, I mean, my district is larger than nine States by landmass, even though I am in Virginia. Most people don't realize that Virginia is as big as it is. And I represent a big chunk of the mountains in Virginia, and we don't even have cell coverage in all those areas. Depending on which way the mountain leans or where you happen to be on the road, you can have some significant holes in areas that people wouldn't realize.

I mean, it hasn't happened lately, but even a few miles outside of Blacksburg, in Virginia Tech, there were times not that long ago where people were like, "Yeah, we don't have a signal," even though it is one of the most wired communities in Virginia.

So, when you are looking at all this—and you have gone into it a little bit, but—what is the criteria that you all use to select sites for FirstNet equipment?

I know there are a lot of problems and you have a lot of different issues, whether it is buildings or mountains. In Representative Peters' district it is the buildings, in mine it is the mountains.

Sheriff ADKINSON. Amen. Yes, sir.

You know, forgive me if I quote Rousseau on this, but don't let perfect be the enemy of better.

Mr. GRIFFITH. There you go.

Sheriff ADKINSON. What we are trying to do is say, where can we solve the most impact as quickly as possible until we can get back and make it perfect, right, to continue to make it better?

We just did some in the mountains recently, and I—you might find this hard to believe, but Florida is a very flat State. And I think we are at, you know—

Mr. GRIFFITH. I have noticed that when visiting your beaches, sir.

Sheriff ADKINSON. I am actually at the tallest point, and it is about 160 feet, just so you know.

But the reality—all joking aside, the reality of it is, we try to prioritize on where can we have the most impact and what modality is the best, right? So it may be the satellite, it may be the tower, it may be the booster, whichever that is.

But there is an emphasis given on those places that do not have coverage first. So the problem is, I give you coverage, and you go, "Well, maybe it is not as good as it needs to be yet."

But nobody from this Authority or certainly this board should ever tell you to switch to FirstNet if it does not work sustainably for you. You will never hear a board member say that. That is not our job to do that. It is to support the American people.

Mr. GRIFFITH. Yeah.

And I know you mentioned earlier, in your county, one of the hurricanes. When we got hit with Helene a year and a piece ago, a big section of my district was—I mean, law enforcement and everybody was out of touch with anybody else because we lost—for various reasons, we lost cell coverage across a big swath of my district.

So let's talk about these planned—you mentioned, and several others have as well—you mentioned the planned Coverage Enhancement Workshops, and I would like to know what that entails.

And, as a part of that, I would like to know if you have any planned for south side or southwest Virginia. Because, you know, all politics is local. What are you doing in my district?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I am actually intimately familiar with that, Representative.

No, the short version is yes. We listen to the representatives from your State to tell us where you think is the priority, where do you believe that it should be first, and what can most correct your problems fastest.

So you have had that Coverage—I know for a—you have had a Coverage Enhancement Workshop in your State. And we took those recommendations—I apologize, I will have to get back with you on the specifics of that. That has been done.

Mr. GRIFFITH. And I appreciate that. And here is the concern that happens—

Mr. AGNEW. Congressman?

Mr. GRIFFITH. And I appreciate—I will get to you in just a second.

I appreciate that you have had something in the State. Here is the problem: I have counties in my district that are closer to seven other State capitals than they are to Richmond. So, if you are not actually on my end of the State, you might not be getting the same picture, because they sometimes—and they try their hardest, I am not fussing—but sometimes they don't understand what is happening out in the mountainous areas, because, I mean, from Richmond to the end of my district is about 10, 10½ hours. So they are a lot closer to the capital of, as I said, seven or nine other States.

Get back to me on that.

And then you wanted to say something, Mr. Agnew.

Mr. AGNEW. Yes, Congressman. I just—

Mr. GRIFFITH. You have about 45 seconds.

Mr. AGNEW. Yeah. And I will be fast.

Your district has been a major focus. You have—

Mr. GRIFFITH. Great.

Mr. AGNEW [continuing]. Thirty sites that have been built.

Mr. GRIFFITH. How many?

Mr. AGNEW. Thirty have been built.

Mr. GRIFFITH. That is fabulous. Thanks.

Mr. AGNEW. And 7 of them—or, 14 of them were part of the opt-in process, where public safety you have to build here or Virginia is not opting in.

In the coverage workshops, there are seven identified areas in your network. There is a partnership with your local telecom and electric provider. That is how Lee County is getting service. So this network is designed for your first responders.

Mr. GRIFFITH. All right. I am going to go over a minute or two, and I apologize, Mr. Chairman.

When you talk about Lee County, is that when we went down there for the tower that they put up in Lee County? I think you put a couple of them up there.

Mr. AGNEW. That is correct.

Mr. GRIFFITH. That was fabulous. It not only gave us the first responders, but it gave us the first time in that part of the county we had any cell coverage.

I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes Representative Dingell for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Mrs. DINGELL. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I want to take a moment to underscore just how essential FirstNet is for public safety in Michigan. It is a lifeline for first responders.

In my district, the Ann Arbor Fire and the University of Michigan Health System rely on it every day. At the University of Michigan, nurses use iPads connected to FirstNet to ensure they remain prioritized above commercial networks during emergencies so they can communicate when it matters most.

More than 950 public safety agencies and organizations in Michigan use FirstNet, supported by over 1,850 Band 14 sites. In my district alone, there are more than 10,000 FirstNet subscribers. And, nationwide, the network now supports more than 7 million connections and covers nearly 3 million square miles.

Across Michigan, police, fire, EMS, and other first responders turn to FirstNet not just for connectivity but for operational reliability. They use it to restore communication during severe weather, coordinate rescues using push-to-talk and real-time data, and improve indoor coverage.

And, as our emergency response needs grow, we have to ensure that FirstNet stays secure, resilient, and interconnected with other emergency communications. And that is why this reauthorization matters and why it is so important we get it right.

So FirstNet's value is clearest when everything else fails. In Michigan, we saw FirstNet play a critical role during severe weather and search-and-rescue operations in the Upper Peninsula, where a FirstNet satellite cell on a light truck helped coordinate the response that led to the safe recovery of a missing 8-year-old after nearly 50 hours.

Sheriff Adkinson, can you speak to why it is critical for Congress to reauthorize FirstNet to ensure first responders have reliable, resilient communications?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Thank you for that question.

Absolutely fundamentally necessary.

I will use my own organization again. We are on what was called the State Law Enforcement Radio System. That system temporarily went down. It is not supposed to go down. It went down. But because we made the decision when Florida opted in under Governor Scott, I think in 2018—we made that decision that any infrastructure we built was going to have a FirstNet backup—we were

able to go from the failure of our land mobile radio to dispatching calls. And, again, I am medical—I am air medical as well as law enforcement, and we were able to do that over our FirstNet phones.

Seamless service and redundancy and resiliency—it is critical because lives matter.

Mrs. DINGELL. So I am going to—the draft bill would extend FirstNet’s authority through 2037, but it also makes governance changes to the program by removing the FirstNet Authority status as an independent entity and subjecting its actions to a vote by the NTIA.

I understand that first responders and public safety officials have concerns about this shift, particularly the requirement that most FirstNet actions must receive prior NTIA approval. On the other hand, the Office of Inspector General has detailed several concerns, including network reliability issues and deficiencies in contract administration.

Sheriff Adkinson, how do you assess the potential impacts of making the FirstNet’s actions subject to NTIA approval? And what safeguards are necessary to ensure that first responders continue to have an independent voice in how the network is governed and operated?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Thank you for that question.

I think there are a couple things.

Pragmatically, the way it functions now is NTIA hires essentially every employee. Now, they can have consultation and may choose to do that. They are not—to my knowledge not required by law to consult before even hiring the executive director. We certainly think that that is something the Board needs direct oversight on, as I have said numerous times today.

The second part of that is, where there cannot be a breakdown—where there absolutely cannot be a breakdown—is in the building-out strategic planning and growth of this system. That cannot in any way, shape, or form be impaired, because otherwise you are going to deal with—let’s just say this: It should be done by the experts and that meet the needs of the people we serve.

So that, to me, is a non sequitur—a nonnegotiable in that regard.

Mrs. DINGELL. I am going to be out of time, so I want to thank you. I am going to have more—I had more questions for the other two witnesses, so you are going to get them on the record.

This is critical for my State and our getting it right.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes Mr. Latta for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Mr. LATTA. Well, thanks, Mr. Chairman.

And thanks to our panel for being with us today. This is really important.

I was on the committee when we had our first hearings for FirstNet, and as I mentioned in a prior hearing, you could say that things didn’t go quite well. It was kind of a top-down approach that was coming from pretty much Washington to the local governments, and it just wasn’t working.

And I can remember the hearing that we had, that there was someone from Ohio who testified on behalf—and also from Mary-

land. I can't believe I can still remember this. But what we did see over time was a vast improvement.

And so, you know, Sheriff, if I could just start with you. And I think it is important, because, again, when I am out with all of my first responders across my district—and I have a pretty big district that spans across northern Ohio—we have to make sure, you know, that the coverage is there and that it is working.

And I know that—I have been out for—one was more of a demonstration for FirstNet, but a second one—the first time I was out to see it was actually when the solar eclipse was occurring, and it actually went across my district, all the way. And so, I mean, they knew they were going to have some serious issues out there. And it worked.

But, in your experience and when you are talking to people from around the country, what is your experience in how not only law enforcement but all first responders are finding FirstNet?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I think it is a very positive response. And I have to tell you, one of the things that I hear is, to your point, when this was originally done, I don't think people thought it could get done, and I think that is what has changed.

I think there are a lot of people that deserve credit. Certainly not me. I wasn't here for this. But if you go across the country, people are relying on FirstNet to make life-and-death decisions, and they are impressed with the fact that this thing is getting done.

Again, we are not saying perfection, but we are saying that this has been an overwhelming success. And it is going to continue to grow and build out. So I am extremely proud for the men and women that actually built this system.

Mr. LATTA. Good. Well, thank you.

Mr. Agnew, if I could ask you a question here. You know, telehealth services are a crucial asset in our healthcare system. And with the spectrum that has been allocated by Congress, first responders using FirstNet connectivity can provide emergency telehealth services, which can be lifesaving. If there is an accident in a remote area that is far from a hospital, first responders can connect a patient to a doctor using FirstNet and provide critical care until the patient is delivered to that hospital.

And before I ask the actual question, I will give you an example. I was at one of my hospitals in our region, and they had a stroke unit. And they were showing what the stroke unit could do. It was amazing. It was absolutely amazing.

But I am always—having served on this committee for so long, I didn't want to bust anybody's bubble, but I did ask a question. I said, "How far can you go out?" And so they showed where that circumference was. But then it was pretty much like, if you were on the other side of it, they couldn't get to you.

So that is that life-saving right there, is that we want to make sure it is expanded all the way out there so it can serve everyone and not, you know, in a particular area, what they were doing.

So how important is it that FirstNet continues to expand connectivity across the country so all these types of programs can be utilized?

Mr. AGNEW. It is very important, Congressman. I mean, the mission is to ensure public safety receives the technology and they

never get left behind like they were. They get 5G and 6G technology.

But then it is about the coverage, building out in the rural, the underserved areas, the Tribal areas, even in some of the areas, as we mentioned, the sheriff mentioned, in-building and maybe some of the dense places. Public safety deserves the coverage. This program is going to allow it to happen.

And to your point about extending e-health out—and so that is what FirstNet is going to do, is just continue to grow, based on public safety's feedback.

Mr. LATTA. Well, thank you.

I will just close on this. Because, on 9/11, I was driving—I was in the General Assembly in Ohio at the time. And, of course, everything just collapsed. You know, you were trying to use your cell phone to find out what was going on, and, literally, in front of the statehouse in Columbus—it took almost an hour just to drive that one block, but—there was no communication. Everything was down—everything.

And so, also, you know, for our first responders out there, you know, you are worried about that.

But, finally, someone—you know, other members of the General Assembly were coming out and saying—if they saw you in your car, they yelled, “You have to go home.”

But that is how things collapsed on 9/11. We all saw it. But, you know, what we all really saw was what happened in—especially in New York.

And that is why, with FirstNet, we want to make sure that that never, ever occurs again. Because we want to make sure, for the people that FirstNet—or the first responders out there trying to protect, but also just protect those first responders, that they can always be in connection with one another.

And, Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes Representative Barragán for 5 minutes to ask her questions.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here today, for your testimony, and for the work that you do day in and day out.

I think I have heard a repeating theme, some questions which I already had, about how to make sure that the network works, that it is available when there is a disaster, when there is an emergency; and many questions about what is being done to make sure there is coverage in places where there is not coverage now, and efforts being done by AT&T, of course, to harden the system. So I am going to focus my questions on a different area.

Sheriff Adkinson, under the current law, the FirstNet Authority must reinvest any revenue generated into the FirstNet network, which AT&T owns and operates.

The bill we are considering today would enable the FirstNet Authority to invest in new and emerging broadband technologies like satellite internet.

If this bill becomes law, will the funding flow only through AT&T, or could the FirstNet Authority pay other providers, subcontractors, or technology vendors directly?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Thank you for that question, Representative.

I think the Authority and the Board specifically says that we should always look at what is the best service for the American people and the delivery of that service, in whatever capacity that is. So, if that—as long as everything we do enhances the coverage and what we are doing, then it makes sense. If it doesn't, it doesn't make sense.

In regard to using other folks, that is something contractually that would have to be worked out. But, yes, I think there should be the ability to take whatever is the best application or service, that that is what we should be looking at.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. So you think that payments could be made directly to those others, not through AT&T?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I am going to have to defer on that question.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. OK. Do you think that needs to be spelled out more in the legislation?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I think so. I think so.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. You think so. OK.

I am also now going to follow up on this—I am looking at “Oversight of First Responder Network Authority,” an OIG report. The inspector general has identified \$1.13 billion that the FirstNet Authority could have used more efficiently, according to the report.

Mr. Dame, can you explain if section 3 of this new bill will bring the FirstNet Authority more clearly under NTIA's authority?

Rather, the bill, we know, under the section 3, more clearly brings the FirstNet Authority under NTIA's authority. Do you think that is going to help prevent further use of funds so that they are efficiently used?

Mr. DAME. I do.

And, as we have seen across many inspector general reports, there is this overarching theme of the need for greater performance accountability and contract oversight, and I believe that that is an area where NTIA can support.

We never want to get in the middle of strategic decisions that first responders should be making on the Board and with the Public Safety Advisory Committee, but I believe, in terms of performance accountability, that is an area where NTIA and the Department of Commerce can support the Authority to a greater degree.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Great.

And, Sheriff, I want to follow up on the same report. There is another result in this report that says that the OIG made 50 recommendations. Twenty-four of the recommendations remain unimplemented.

Who should be implementing those remaining 24, and what is the status?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Thank you for that question.

As I said in my initial statement, that is our responsibility. The Board is entirely responsible for making sure that gets done, through their executive director and staff.

And I will tell you, all those are in the process of being cleared or closed in close cooperation with the OIG. We have met with them, the executive director has met with them, and we are moving toward resolving them.

But, more importantly, we have now established a relationship where there is a close line of communication, because I need to ensure this doesn't happen again. And that is really the short version of that.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Yeah.

Well, I have to say and just reiterate what my colleagues have all reiterated, that this is so critically important for all our communities. And I think it sounds like, when we all spoke to our local elected officials in counties and cities, the pattern was: We want it to be reliable, we want there to be transparency, we need it to work. And so I think whatever we can do to make sure that that happens is something that Congress and us, as lawmakers, are focused on.

So I will end with a very brief question. Does anybody on the panel think there is anything that is missing from the draft legislation that needs to be added?

We will start with you, Mr. Agnew, since you are the one we haven't gotten to.

Mr. AGNEW. I don't think there is anything that needs to be added.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. OK.

Mr. Dame?

Mr. DAME. No. NTIA supports the bill. Thank you.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Sheriff?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Just in—consistent with my previous statement, that there should be some direct oversight from the Board of the executive director so that we have some say in who that is and what their performance metrics would be.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Great. Thank you.

Thank you all.

I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes Mr. Fry for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Mr. FRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

FirstNet was created to address a clear failure exposed on September 11th: Our first responders could not reliably communicate across systems when it mattered most. Congress responded, obviously. And, today, FirstNet is widely used by first responders across the country, including rural and coastal communities like those I represent in South Carolina.

In fact, I think there has been a recent expansion of FirstNet in Marion County. The sheriff is thrilled, because his officers can now communicate when they need it the most.

As we approach the sunset, though, Congress, I think, has a unique role and a responsibility to ensure continuity of service while also examining governance, oversight, and performance. Reauthorization should focus on reliability, interoperability, and accountability—a lot of "-abilities, if you will—so first responders can depend on that network without disruption.

So I appreciate all of you being here today.

Sheriff Adkinson, when first responders—in fact, in Marion County, South Carolina, Adkinsons are like Smiths, so you might have some family in the district.

But when first responders identify coverage gaps or performance issues in the field, how does that information flow from local agencies to the Board and into investment decisions?

Sheriff ADKINSON. It flows in a couple of different ways.

First and foremost, we have individuals who represent those specific areas to maintain contact with them, "How is this going?" Field reps, for putting it another way.

We also have the Public Safety Advocacy Committee, who are from multiple disciplines and advise the Board where they see shortcomings.

And, third—and I think this is critical—there is a direct relationship out from those organizations to the FirstNet Authority. In other words, they can pick up the phone and call us, as well. They are not afraid to do that. You might find that hard to believe, but the first responders are perfectly willing to pick up the phone and call.

So I think the field reps are crucial to what we do. I think the PSAC is crucial to what we do. And from that, we try to make the best decisions on the most—again, where do you get the most impact, what is the most critical need, and try to stagger that.

Mr. FRY. I appreciate that.

And I think Congressman Griffith raised the issue about rural Virginia and that you have meetings in Virginia—you have had a meeting in Virginia, I think you testified to.

But I was curious, just to kind of follow up on that, how often those meetings take place. Do they take place in different parts of the State? Are they ongoing meetings, where the situations evolve and maybe in a year or so you go back to that State to see if the terrain has changed? What does that look like?

Just curious on how you, you know, listen actively on the ground to what the States are needing most.

Sheriff ADKINSON. Yeah. We actually just finished up the majority of our coverage workshop for the entire country, right? The field reps or the representatives are out all the time. They are assigned to specific States or areas.

And, depending on the State, we don't—in other words, say, for instance, we have one in Florida and it is in one district. We may hold two there. We may hold three ultimately. It depends what is necessary.

So there is kind of an ongoing path of reaching back and saying it is time to go back there, we have heard issues or concern there, the PSAC has reported there is an issue there, we have a fire chief who says there is an issue there. So we are trying to do that on an ongoing basis.

But I will tell you, I think that is part of our ongoing strategic plan, too, is to set a pattern. Listen, if you say you are going to do something, you have to do it. And so, when you start saying you are coming back, that—we don't want to promise and underdeliver.

Mr. FRY. So you are coming back?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Yeah. We will be back.

Mr. FRY. All right.

Sheriff ADKINSON. I know the chair. He says it will happen.

Mr. FRY. There you go.

Mr. Agnew, outages, I think, are a big concern, just generally, and whether or not first responders can access this, use it.

What changes have been made since the 2024 outage to reduce the risk of future disruptions and improve notifications for first responder usage?

Mr. AGNEW. Yeah. Thank you for that question.

And just as a recap, in 2024 the FirstNet Core experienced a 2-hour outage, but AT&T prioritized, per the contract, the FirstNet program, and we got that network up and running and that core up and running within a couple hours.

We have subsequently done a root-cause analysis, an after-action report, and identified specifically what went wrong and what specific implementations need to occur. FirstNet put forth a task force. We were held accountable and basically delivered to ensure that situation wouldn't happen.

So this is oversight in action. It is accountability in action happening. So we have now—and we funded the investments necessary to enhance the network.

Mr. FRY. Thank you for that.

I have other questions, but I think the chairman runs a tight ship. So with that, I will yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Appreciate that.

The Chair now recognizes Mr. Menendez for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Thank you, Chairman. Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

The horrific terrorist attacks on September 11 exposed critical weaknesses in our public safety communications when overloaded radio, landline, and mobile networks left police officers, firefighters, and paramedics unable to communicate effectively. First responders answered the call on 9/11 from across the river in New Jersey, including many from my district.

The First Responder Network Authority was created out of the 9/11 Commission Report out of a recognition that we needed nationwide network for public safety communications to keep Americans safe during emergencies.

Today's hearing is also critical to the communities I represent, because every year we experience a growing number of natural disasters, such as Superstorm Sandy and Hurricane Ida, which knocked out power for many local 9-1-1 centers and disrupted communications networks down the entire northeastern seaboard.

Our district also includes a vast amount of critical infrastructure that has led Homeland Security experts to call the area between Newark Airport and the Port of Elizabeth the most dangerous 2 miles in America. This makes strengthening FirstNet security and resiliency essential for families in our district so that first responders know their communication tools will work when they need them most.

I would like to ask each witness—just yes or no—would you agree that oversight of the resilience and security of the FirstNet network is especially vital for communities with increased exposure to natural disasters and substantial critical infrastructure assets?

We will start with you, Sheriff.

Sheriff ADKINSON. Absolutely. And I would say, remember that the representative of Homeland Security as well as DOJ is on there, and as the third member, which is a technical expertise that is provided by several of the board members, one in particular, and this is the issue of cybersecurity. The ability to stay up against a cyber attack, that is absolutely key in my mind.

Mr. MENENDEZ. We will come back to cybersecurity, don't you worry.

Mr. DAME. Yes.

Mr. AGNEW. Yes, and we are currently held accountable to 3,600 requirements in the thousand reports to do exactly what you are saying, Congressman.

Mr. MENENDEZ. I appreciate that.

That is why I am pleased that we are moving forward with the bipartisan discussion draft to reauthorize FirstNet with increased oversight of the resiliency and security of the network.

Mr. Agnew, in light of the numerous natural disasters that have impacted public safety communications in New Jersey, how is AT&T working to improve the resilience of FirstNet statewide?

Mr. AGNEW. Thank you for that question. And Superstorm Sandy is what created the Response Operation Group program. It started in New Jersey from that experience, and in fact New Jersey was one of the broadband technology opportunity programs that actually set one of the seven that basically built or formulated FirstNet, and it was New Jersey Net. Actually, New Jersey Net has been incorporated within the FirstNet program.

But that Response Operation Group is dedicated individuals, former public safety officials. Over 190 assets, plus the 750 assets AT&T brings to the table, coordinates with public safety, as what is going on with the FIFA event. "Where are you going to be? Where do you need the equipment? Where are we staging?" It is constant collaboration, training, and practicing so an event like Superstorm Sandy, the team is prepared. The team is prepared to stage and know exactly where to go.

Mr. MENENDEZ. I appreciate that. I appreciate New Jersey leading the way with AT&T.

Sheriff Adkinson, in your opinion, does the FirstNet reauthorization discussion draft provide for better dissemination of outage information so that public safety agencies have situational awareness of FirstNet's operational status?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Yes.

Mr. MENENDEZ. OK. And it is critical that FirstNet remains operational even in the toughest circumstances.

Sheriff Adkinson, in your testimony you touched on the importance of cybersecurity enhancements to FirstNet network. In what ways would this discussion draft strengthen oversight over the cybersecurity of FirstNet?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I can't speak specifically to how that legislation will increase cybersecurity impact other than to say this: The board is specifically addressing that and making that part of key performance indexes to be rolled out. We haven't finished that yet because I think it still needs more work.

Mr. MENENDEZ. But you would say it is one of the sort of upmost important issues that you are working on on the board, given sort

of what we are seeing with increased cyberattacks, especially from foreign adversaries?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Absolutely a priority.

Mr. MENENDEZ. I appreciate that.

I want to go back, Mr. Agnew. You mentioned this, but how is AT&T investing in preparations for the upcoming FIFA World Cup finals in and around MetLife Stadium in New Jersey through collaboration with local law enforcement?

Mr. AGNEW. We are meeting with all 12 of the cities. Of course, MetLife Stadium, again, planning, coordinating, where first responders are, where we need to be, making incremental investments in in-building coverage. Public safety is—you know, what is unique about FIFA is, unlike a Jets or Giants game where you can park around—

Mr. MENENDEZ. People are actually going to be there.

Mr. AGNEW. That is a good point.

Mr. MENENDEZ. I am a Giants fan, so—

Mr. AGNEW. FIFA has different rules than NFL. And you can't park around the stadium, so we have to move all our assets, coordinate with public safety. That is going on. I feel very good about the performance of what you are about to see.

Mr. MENENDEZ. I appreciate it. I look forward to continuing to work with you as well as the entire committee on moving this forward.

Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes Mr. Carter for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. Thank you, gentlemen, for being here. And thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this meeting.

And we all have established the fact that FirstNet was created so that our first responders would never again have to face the communications failures that we saw on 9/11, and I remain strongly supportive of reauthorizing this critical public safety network.

I had the pleasure of visiting the AT&T facility, the disaster recovery facility in Covington, Georgia, and very impressed with the equipment there, very impressed with the infrastructure. It supports the infrastructure and operations that keep first responders connected across the State.

Congress, as I understand it, entered into a 25-year partnership with AT&T to build and operate and maintain this nationwide network for public safety. And as AT&T continues to operate FirstNet and expand its infrastructure, I want to better understand the implications of having a single commercial provider owning and running the underlying network.

Mr. Agnew, does AT&T own the network that is being built for FirstNet?

Mr. AGNEW. That is correct. Basically, the contract, just to understand it, it is a services-based contract that AT&T implements at the direction of the Authority, all the FirstNet-specific elements that are required to deliver the service. And it is the FirstNet Authority, actually, holds license to this spectrum.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. So if the contract is not renewed when it ends, what will happen to the infrastructure that has been built?

Mr. AGNEW. The infrastructure remains with AT&T, but just to level set expectations, wireless networks upgrade—you are upgrading your entire network every 5 years. So it has a very limited lifespan on network equipment. AT&T spends about \$145 billion every 5 years upgrading a network.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. OK. Thank you for that.

As I understand it, Sheriff Adkinson, FirstNet is governed by a 15-person board that includes permanent Federal members and 12 Commerce-appointed experts, and they have the responsibility of ensuring that the network stays focused on public safety needs.

First of all, thank you for your service, Sheriff, and for your leadership on the FirstNet Board.

What enforcement tools does the board actually have to ensure compliance with build-out and performance requirements under this agreement?

Sheriff ADKINSON. They can withhold payment. I mean, ultimately that is where this is at. If appropriate, you can set up indices, again, for measures for them to meet, but withholding of funds is the major—

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. Have you had to do that?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Yeah, there have been delays.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. There have been delays?

Sheriff ADKINSON. There have been times that we have had to double-check and go back and do things, but all of those were rectified and met in a manner that was sufficient.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. So you are pretty satisfied?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I am satisfied.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. OK.

Do you believe that Congress should enhance the board's oversight authority or transparency requirements as part of the reauthorization to better protect first responders?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Yes.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. You do?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I do. I think the board should take more ownership and more responsibility in making sure this is done appropriately.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. But should Congress be the one to do that, to give you that enhanced oversight?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I believe so.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. OK. Fair enough.

That is really all I have. Thank all of you all for being here. This is very important.

And as I said, I had the opportunity to visit Covington, very impressed with the infrastructure. And, Ms. Ferguson, thank you for setting that up and helping us with that, because it is—when you see it, you are impressed. It is a big investment. There is no question about that. So thank you all.

And I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes Representative McClellan for 5 minutes for your questions.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And I want to reiterate how excited I am to be working with Mr. Dunn of Florida on this very important legislation.

Let me first ask—so in the bill, we turn what is the executive director into an Associate Administrator position who is a senior-service-level official appointed by the Assistant Secretary. Now, they are subject to performance reviews in consultation with the chair of the board and any committee members that deal with governance and risk.

But, Sheriff Adkinson, several times you have raised reasonable concerns about the relationship between the board and what will now be this Associate Administrator.

And, Mr. Dame, I would like to hear your thoughts on how the legislation can work to address that relationship to further improve FirstNet Authority's accountability.

Mr. DAME. Thank you, and thank you for your leadership on this bill, Congresswoman.

NTIA believes that moving the FirstNet Authority over to be a line office within NTIA will be important to improve performance accountability, but I want to be clear that the strategic decisions for public safety on their network is to come from the board, the Public Safety Advisory Committee.

I think where NTIA and the Department can support to a much greater degree is to provide performance accountability as the Authority is implementing the decisions the board has provided and for performance accountability after the fact, after implementation.

I understand Sheriff Adkinson's point, and I think ultimately a solution can be found as Congress considers this bill.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. Thank you.

And, Sheriff Adkinson, I mean, your concerns are heard loud and clear. That is why I didn't ask you, but I wanted to make sure that we gave Mr. Dame a chance to respond, and I think this is an area where we will definitely look.

So, Mr. Agnew and Sheriff Adkinson, can you describe how AT&T has met its reinvestment obligations in the nationwide public safety broadband network and how the FirstNet Authority ensures those reinvestments align with public safety priorities rather than broader commercial objectives?

Mr. AGNEW. I think it is pretty straightforward from a reinvestment standpoint. The framework was established in February of 2024 of what FirstNet would invest in, a new core, new coverage, new technologies inclusive of satellite. It is now incumbent on the voice of public safety and the FirstNet Authority to determine what those investments are.

AT&T is the contractor. We can share our expertise and the technology, but we don't dictate where coverage goes or the technology to implement it. We are just responsible for meeting the requirements of implementation.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. OK. And, Sheriff Adkinson, did you want to add anything to that?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Yes, ma'am. I mean, that is the short version of it. We are going to tell them where we believe these towers need to be, based on the input from public safety, and that is where the funds should be spent.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. OK. Also for Sheriff and Mr. Dame, the IG reports have found that FirstNet's Authority has not followed standard Federal contracting and procurement procedures.

Is there any reason why the Authority should not be subject to the same Federal acquisition standards as other Federal entities? And if so, what is that?

Sheriff ADKINSON. [Inaudible] structured in regard to the public-private partnership of it. The reality is any procurement we make should ultimately be transparent, accountable, and have something that can be reviewed. There is no way around that. Now, whether that meets that standard or there are a separate set of rules for a P3, I don't think anybody here should argue against that.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. OK. Mr. Dame?

Mr. DAME. And I would just add that the FirstNet Authority decided to use the Federal acquisition regulations, which I think was the right decision, and that the Department has provided delegations of authority to FirstNet officials to perform those procurement activities.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. OK. I probably don't have enough time for the remaining, but thank you. This has been very helpful. As we said earlier, this is a discussion draft, not the final. And so I, for one, have found your testimony very helpful as we move forward.

And I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes Representative Cammack for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

I am very proud to have one of our own from the great free State of Florida here testifying before our committee. So thank you, Sheriff. I would be remiss if I didn't say "Go Gators." I know those are fighting words.

But as everyone in this room knows, FirstNet was created after 9/11 to fix a deadly failure. First responders can't do their jobs if they can't communicate. Congress has responded by helping build a nationwide public safety network with priority and preemption when lives are on the line.

By many measures, FirstNet has delivered. It serves tens of thousands of agencies, spans millions of square miles, and has proven its value during disasters, and that success is exactly why Congress must reauthorize it before its authority expires in 2027.

But reauthorization shouldn't be on autopilot. Outages, coverage gaps, especially in rural areas, and inspector general findings show that performance must come with accountability and action. So this bill, this discussion draft, it strengthens oversight, improves outage reporting, clarifies responsibility, and ensures that FirstNet keeps evolving. When accountability is clear, public safety is stronger.

So I am going to start with you, Sheriff. You have emphasized that FirstNet works best when investments are driven by real operational needs. You and I have discussed, for example, in my district that the overwhelming majority of my sheriffs are not on FirstNet. My husband, who is a first responder and a user of FirstNet, was unable to utilize his service during the last three major hurricanes.

Now, I know that there have been challenges in deployment, but can you briefly detail how, through our conversations and conversations you have had with others, that we can make FirstNet work

for all of our rural sheriffs in disaster-prone areas? Specifically, what reinvestment needs to happen?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Thank you for that question, Representative, and thank you for your work on this, because I know your personal interest and that it matters.

And I will use your district specifically. You know, we went back and held a coverage workshop there in, I think, August of this last year, and said, you know, listening to our firefighters, our first responders, where can we increase the coverage? What needs to be done? I think something like 15 sites have been added in the last year and a half in that district, but that doesn't mean it is going to be perfect. And it certainly doesn't mean the districts farther down south—so if I am in Lafayette County or Gilchrist County, which are extremely rural counties, they may need more than that one site or two sites. We are going to have to continue to do that.

So I think it is incumbent upon us at the Authority to ensure that we keep these workshops going, we keep the field reps going, and we prioritize based on the immediacy of need and where we identify these problems.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Well, and that is a great way to dovetail into the next question about interoperability. So there is some discussion within this language today that there needs to be a concerted effort towards interoperability for different services, particularly in disaster situations. Can you speak to that?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Yeah. I think, clearly, you know, obviously, right now I could call you on—you know, I could use my FirstNet phone and call you on a Verizon or T-Mobile. So you have that level of interoperability. Also, they have developed the ability to talk over land mobile radio as well too, the push to talk if you do that.

I think some of the new product that is coming forth, the technology is clearly working toward that. That is the final singularity of goal, is that we have one ring to rule them all. And from a standpoint of a unified command—you knew I would work in “Lord of the Rings” here at some point—there has to be a unified command. There shouldn't be any question about this work and the ability to work during that.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Excellent. Thank you.

I am going to shift to you. Is it “Dom” or “Dame”?

Mr. DAME. “Dame.”

Mrs. CAMMACK. “Dame.”

Mr. DAME. Yeah.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Like hot dame. OK. Just kidding. It is a joke.

Mr. DAME. Notre Dame.

Mrs. CAMMACK. OK. All right. We are going to talk about that later.

So you have talked about today quite a bit about the blurred lines of authority. Under the current structure, who is currently responsible for enforcing contract performance, and why hasn't that always worked in practice—that is the first part—but then, how would making—this is the critical part—how would making FirstNet a clear line office within NTIA improve the day-to-day oversight and accountability?

Mr. DAME. And thank you, Congresswoman, for your leadership on public safety communications.

It is the murkiness and the ambiguity of the independent authority within NTIA that has caused the issue, and there are dedicated, mission-driven staff at the FirstNet Authority who are working on these issues, who care very much about making sure the first responders have the network they need.

But we think that with the proposed changes and the draft discussion text, that having the FirstNet Authority move over as a line office of NTIA, there would be greater enhancements.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Well, and because my time is running short, I just want to highlight H.R. 1519, the Public Safety Communications Act, which would formally establish the Office of Public Safety within NTIA. It would cut the red tape, create a single point of oversight for FirstNet.

Do you agree that that would be helpful in establishing greater ability to be flexible for FirstNet but oversight at the same time?

Mr. DAME. I do. I think there need to be some reconciliations between the two bills, but, yes, ma'am.

Mrs. CAMMACK. And, Sheriff, would you agree?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I believe there would be delineated lines of authority so there is no question about the ambiguity of who is doing what.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Excellent. I appreciate you all's feedback today. And with that, I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

And keeping it in Florida, I will recognize Representative Castor for 5 minutes to ask her questions.

Ms. CASTOR. Thank you, Chairman Hudson and Ranking Member Matsui. Yes, we are rich in Floridians on the committee.

And thank you to our witnesses. You have had some very constructive recommendations for us.

I think there is a lot of interest from Floridians because we are so susceptible to disasters. You talked about Hurricane Michael up in your neck of the woods, but really in the Tampa Bay area, we are still reeling from hurricanes Helene and Milton in the fall of 2024, the devastating one-two punch where folks lost powers for weeks. Three million Floridians lost power after that, and it was long and sustained. I know Rep. Cammack knows this all too well.

Damage to critical infrastructure. There is no—people don't anticipate that they are going to lose internet and cell service, but they do, and it is just the worst-case scenario to think that our first responders, when towers go down, communication networks go down, that that won't hamper rescue and recovery.

So I, after the storms, checked in on the operation of FirstNet with Pinellas County Emergency Management. They said AT&T has done well building out towers and infrastructure in Florida with hurricanes in mind, but the portable sites, especially the compact rapid deployables, were particularly helpful to provide reliable service.

The Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office said that FirstNet has been very successful for the county, connecting up all phones, cameras, patrol cars, laptops. They said that the service has disaster-grade reliability and that there have been little to no issues with the product or provider.

But both emphasized to me that if the Congress is going to act, that they were concerned that there would be more bureaucratic red tape. They both highlighted that if we are going to make changes, to ensure that there are no obstacles created to action.

Is there anything you see in the draft legislation or in responding to the OIG's report that would create unnecessary barriers or obstacles?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Thank you for that question. I am assuming you are pointing at me, so I want to make sure that I am answering appropriately.

Ms. CASTOR. Yes, sir.

Sheriff ADKINSON. I think when you look at that specifically, those OIGs largely deal with individuals not following directions or doing what they are told or being held accountable. And I sound like a broken record on this issue, but I think it is fundamentally the crux of the issue.

You can switch responsibility to multiple different people, but if you are not going to hold them accountable, I am not sure what we are going to accomplish. So we have got to do that.

Again, that individuals—those individual positions, they currently are hired, selected, supervised by NTIA today, full stop. And so I just think we just need to be clear so that we can say this is how it needs to be handled and to do it as effectively as possible.

Ms. CASTOR. And you are going to keep an eye to make sure that our local emergency managers and first responders, and as we develop this modernization for FirstNet reauthorization, that there are no barriers to them being able—

Sheriff ADKINSON. Yes, ma'am. And, quite frankly, I worry all the time about these kind of things, whether or not the system is going down, is it working like it needs to. This is what keeps me up at night.

Ms. CASTOR. OK. Mr. Agnew, Florida now is expanding the number of deployables—the compact rapid deployables and more towers, but I hear Rep. Cammack say there are parts of our State that are still struggling.

What is the latest?

Mr. AGNEW. There is still more to be done. As you mentioned, the State of Florida invested in 60 of those compact rapid deployables. So we have actually developed technology where first responders can own their own mobile towers, and so that is how it is happening, so they can self-sustain. There is more coverage coming.

There were 15 sites built. There are three more sites being built in your district in the Tampa area. I believe there are four more coming, Representative Cammack, in your area. There is a lot more work to be done. That is why we need this network to continue, because that investment is going to deliver exactly what you are asking for: more coverage and more deployables for resiliency in hurricanes and other disasters.

Ms. CASTOR. So one of the challenges—and I don't know if this impacts directly on the compact rapid deployables—is just the widespread loss of power afterwards.

Is AT&T developing the battery backups to go with systems?

I mean, there were so many—they kind of go hand in hand. Many hospitals and wastewater infrastructure for local commu-

nities, when they lost power for the long term, they couldn't operate.

Is there the same challenge for communications networks?

Mr. AGNEW. Absolutely. Power in hurricanes and in high winds—power becomes an issue, continuing to harden the network and invest in—

Ms. CASTOR. But do you have partnerships on battery—

Mr. AGNEW. Yes.

Ms. CASTOR [continuing]. Kind of the new wave of batteries?

Mr. AGNEW. Yes, we do.

Ms. CASTOR. OK. Could you provide a little more information on that?

Mr. AGNEW. Sure.

Ms. CASTOR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes Mr. Goldman for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for this hearing, and thank you to the panelists for being here today.

Sheriff, thank you very much for your service. Thank you for your frankness and directness and your testimony today.

Can you just take us through anecdotally what it was like before FirstNet was created, any stories you may have, and then the improvements of FirstNet and where we are today?

Sheriff ADKINSON. You know, we talk about—I mean, obviously, 9/11 is the impetus of this, correct, but I can tell you I have been through—it was Hurricane Katrina when there was no ability to talk or where there was so much volume. The Marjory Stoneman Douglas murders that took place in South Florida. You have everybody trying to call at one time, everybody trying to use that.

What happens now with priority and preemption is that those first responders now have access to this network. The Super Bowl, you know, is a great example of that where you have a lot of folks there. You had the shooting in New Orleans around that same timeframe.

If you look at the number of times that that system was bounced off—and AT&T can provide that. We have seen those numbers—we can see who is actually hitting this system and when they are doing it. But the fact it is not an overlay that is built for them, assuring that we are going to be able to get out is critical, absolutely critical.

Because while we talk about natural disaster, which is a huge thing we worry about, don't forget when you are talking about the inauguration of the President of the United States, when you are talking about a Super Bowl and some incident happens. There might not be a natural disaster, but there is certainly such a surge in usage right then. This ensures that our first responders can get out when nobody else can.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Agnew, I know you spoke about this a little bit earlier with Mr. Pfluger, my colleague from Texas, but I want to go back to the central Texas flooding. Can you talk about—and again, I apologize if you already did that. I was out of the room for a bit.

But can you talk about—some hurricanes you can plan for. You know they are coming, and you can be prepared. No one knew the flooding was going to happen to the level it did in central Texas.

Can you talk about how you all responded to that and how you prepare for something like that or then plan for the future?

Mr. AGNEW. Thank you for that question, Congressman. It is a great question, because you have unplanned events—you have planned events, like a hurricane, where you can plan a couple days, and then unplanned events, which just becomes emergent, and that is exactly what happened with the Texas Hill Country flooding.

You and your staffer have been to our network disaster recovery warehouse. You see the arsenal, but there is intelligence around that where we stage them across the country. We have an AT&T weather operation center that nationally monitors so we know when impacts are occurring so we can respond.

And that is exactly what we did. We responded in force. We sent the cavalry to the whole country. I had folks on my team on the ground with first responders directing search and rescue efforts, ensuring that public safety got the communication they needed.

There was also a cell tower, a full-blown cell tower built in 48 hours. It is magic when public safety and telecommunications gets together what can happen, because there is no more red tape. It is just execution, and that is what the Response Operation Group does with public safety.

We recently recognized at an event with our CEO the employees that actually went down and supported, and they were tired. They were with public safety multiple days. We had to swap some out because of just the emotional demand, of course, of what was going on and what individuals were seeing.

But we learned from those events. We get feedback from those events. One of the things that we learned from the Texas Hill Country is the smaller mobile deployables are so important because it is hard to get in some of those areas. You can't have a huge truck. So we are actually increasing the amount of assets we have of smaller deployables.

Mr. GOLDMAN. That was going to be my followup question, what you learned, so you already answered it.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, thank you. I yield back the balance of my time.

Thank you all very much for being here.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

I now recognize Representative Carter for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. CARTER OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Ranking Member, for holding this important hearing. Thank you all for being here.

As you know, I represent Louisiana's Second Congressional District, New Orleans. Being the hub of entertainment, festivals, sporting events, and concerts, the walkability of our city, the nature of millions of people literally coming in every year for conventions and sporting events and Mardi Gras, which we are celebrating as we speak, the importance of recognizing Mother Nature, who always plays a big role in our community, of hurricane, floods, considering security of mass gathering events, that is why public

safety technologies and communications systems like FirstNet are so critical to protecting the lives and ensuring effective emergency responses to districts like mine. And I strongly, strongly support reauthorizing of this program.

Just a few questions.

Mr. Agnew, for those who may not know, can you share with us why the priority and preemption are critical to protecting public safety during network congestions at large crowd events like Mardi Gras, festivals, sporting events, and concerts?

Mr. AGNEW. Public safety has to get through. They have to communicate. If they can't do that, there could be lives at risk. They could not be responding to the incident that they need, and that is why we built a dedicated core. It is no users—consumer users are on that core.

That is why public safety on Band 14 and all of AT&T's other couple hundred megahertz of spectrum, they get priority so they can communicate. And that is why we have the largest network for public safety built by public safety.

Mr. CARTER OF LOUISIANA. What are some of the things that AT&T has learned since you have been doing this, and what can we do to make it better? What have you learned that made it good? What are the things that you think it hasn't done?

Mr. AGNEW. I think that is a great question. As far as what we have learned, I mentioned to Congressman Goldman, building smaller deployables, building form factors for in-building solutions, building the location capabilities to show where somebody is in the building. We learned that feedback from public safety is so important, because when we take that feedback and deploy a product, it makes it better.

Mr. CARTER OF LOUISIANA. Great.

Sheriff, first of all, thank you. I have appreciated your commentary and the ease with which you have demonstrated your adroitness in this subject matter.

As a first responder, can you talk about how FirstNet works in a city like New Orleans in response to emergencies, natural disasters strike our communities, and equally as important, share with me, are we big enough?

We know that natural disasters come faster. They stay longer. They come in places that historically have not—mudslides and tornados and all of the natural disasters that we see coming.

Are we big enough? And what do we have to do to maintain the level of clear channel, as Mr. Agnew mentioned, going forward?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I will speak to New Orleans specifically. You know, the shooting, the incident with the vehicle about a year and a half ago, that is a great example where, as first responders, the usage there was really significant for a burst. The short period of time as everybody is trying to coordinate what is going on, the ability for that not to be bogged down in commercial traffic is absolutely crucial.

And then the reality of what you just said about natural disasters. There are some things—and I am not going to lie to you, there are some things that we just sometimes miss or are unprepared for. Maui, the Maui fires, you know, a volcano. That was unprecedented. Should we have had more accesses ready to the outlining

island? Yes, full stop. And we are going to have to continue to try and work and do these—

Mr. CARTER OF LOUISIANA. But the very nature of natural disasters is they don't give you warning, right? So as hard as you guys work and as much as we appreciate it, natural disasters don't give a warning, but we can contemplate that this is going to be around for a long time.

What can we do now in advance of the storm to strengthen our systems?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I think what we are doing, what we can do, and what we should do is we should continue expanding that. This is fundamentally the heart of what I think government is about. I mean, this is providing for the public safety, both of the citizens and the people—you know, the people that are providing the service. This is literally a central function of government, in my eyes.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. And with 31 seconds left, each of you, real quickly, rapid fire: Sitting before us, tell us what can we do as Members of Congress to assist you with the incredible work that you have to do with this reauthorization and beyond.

Sheriff ADKINSON. Reauthorization, first and foremost.

Mr. DAME. Reauthorization.

Mr. AGNEW. Reauthorization.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. You made it too easy.

Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes Representative Fedorchak for 5 minutes for her questions.

Mrs. FEDORCHAK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Representative Goldman and I were just talking about how much we appreciate the effort you all put in to being here. We were noticing the sheriff's really sharp uniform. Maybe it is brand new. But we know you have taken a lot of your precious time and resources to get here and share your expertise, so I want to share my appreciation for that.

I am from the State of North Dakota. I am the only Representative there, so I represent the whole State. It is a big, rural State, and I would say—let's say we have a lot of weather challenges. We have blizzards. We have fires, grassland fires. We have tornados, floods, you name it. It is tough for our first responders because they have to cover a big, huge area with few resources.

So the communications technology is really, really vital. So thank you for the work you are putting in to ensure that those communication networks are as vibrant as possible.

I have a few questions for both the sheriff and Mr. Agnew. We will start with you, Sheriff. You emphasized that FirstNet is built by and for public safety and point to the Public Safety Advisory Committee as a key safeguard.

Can you help me understand, in practice, how does the board independently validate the public safety needs, and how is information from the network contractor a part of that, or how do you find information separate from what they are providing to you?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Sure. It is a little bit of a bifurcated system in that regard. So you have the Public Safety Advocacy Committee, right, which is made up of experts all across the public safety field

that meet and represent their individual disciplines. The Authority board and the Authority members meet with that Public Safety Advocacy Committee. In fact, it was supposed to be in Dallas this last week, but weather notwithstanding caused some problems there. This is something we do routinely, to meet with them to get this insight and input.

Additionally, there are field reps from the FirstNet Authority who reach out based on discipline—maybe it is fire, maybe it is EMS, maybe it is law enforcement—to meet with local agencies and entities to understand are we meeting your objectives.

That is separate from the other part, which is the indices that we get from AT&T. Are you performing? How much outage do you have, where it is at? And as I said earlier, we are developing what we consider, the board, key index performance measures that are additional that we are trying to say, “We need some more information here. We want some more information.”

Nobody has pushed back on that, but we are working through a very thoughtful process of things that we think is important for the public to know. So it is kind of bifurcated.

Mrs. FEDORCHAK. Got it. And as the advisory, do you have authority to make your advice—to have them act on it?

Sheriff ADKINSON. The board has the authority to act on the recommendations of the Public Safety Advocacy Committee, yes, ma’am.

Mrs. FEDORCHAK. OK. Very good.

Then second, you stressed that reinvestment must remain disciplined and aligned with mission needs.

How do you ensure that the reinvestment dollars are serving the first responders’ operational needs and not subsidize the improvements to the underlying commercial network?

Sheriff ADKINSON. Well, I think that is at the fundamental heart of it, right? We are asking where these dollars should be spent and whether or not they are a good return on investment. Now, that is fundamentally the responsibility of the board, quite frankly, and if we find out that it is not doing that, then we should take appropriate actions. And if you find out the board isn’t doing that, you should remove board members.

Mrs. FEDORCHAK. Got it.

Mr. Agnew, do you want to speak to that a little bit?

Mr. AGNEW. Yes. We provide—and thank you for the question. We provide the Authority full transparency on our build plans, where the commercial network is going. So the Authority does not have to build there. Where the Authority builds is based off of those feedback from the workshops, based off of the feedback from public safety in those areas that weren’t identified.

So it brings this powerful public-private partnership together. We have got this area covered; AT&T is going to do these areas; FirstNet, you cover these incremental areas. And that is how we have 200,000 more square miles covered, because of that partnership.

Mrs. FEDORCHAK. Got it. All right. And one more followup question. I have a few seconds. You highlight, Mr. Agnew, that public safety agencies may choose among FirstNet, Verizon Frontline, or T-Mobile’s T-Priority offerings.

Given that reality, what is the rationale for reinvestment funding being tied to an infrastructure that only works for users on one network?

Mr. AGNEW. Right. It is important that single network, that it is secure, that it is interoperable, and it is held accountable for first responders. And that reinvestment dollars is going to go into the rural coverage. So we don't recommend diverting any of those funds that would take away from rural sites.

For example, 60 new sites were built in your area. You have got more coming based off of the response. We don't want to see that impacted. North Dakota needs the coverage.

Mrs. FEDORCHAK. Very good.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes Mr. Landsman for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. LANDSMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, all of you for being here, everything that you have done.

And I want to start with you, Mr. Agnew. The work that you all have done to expand coverage, particularly as it relates to these dead zones, the investments that you have made, that won't result in any additional cost to first responders, correct?

Mr. AGNEW. That is correct.

Mr. LANDSMAN. OK. Thank you.

And this is a question for all of you. Part of, obviously, what happens here is that when there is an emergency, civilians get kicked off of Band 14. There is a 20 megahertz threshold on Band 14 for you all and first responders.

Is that enough? Is there any concern that as we go to reauthorize, that that number needs to be reevaluated?

I will start with you, Sheriff.

Sheriff ADKINSON. I think the main thing is that we contemplate what is the actual spectrum used as we increase. Again, through this Internet of Things, data was not something—video data, for instance, was not something that we considered a number of years ago. We haven't tapped this spectrum out, but the reality is whatever is necessary to maintain the mission critical, that is what it needs to be.

I just don't know that I have a projection on what that is going to look like 5 to 10 years—

Mr. LANDSMAN. I just think as you guys—as we work through the reauthorization, to make sure that the language is such that allows you to do that testing, because as I understand it the language would limit you to 20 megahertz. And you are right, things have changed in 20 years and you may use more.

Have you ever come close to using 20 megahertz?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I would have to defer. I have not seen that since I have been onboard.

Mr. AGNEW. As far as that question is concerned, so AT&T, as part of the contract and the commitment to the FirstNet Authority, Band 14 is utilized, but also all band priority is provided on the hundreds of megahertz of spectrum for first responders. So to say it has come close, there is more than enough spectrum as it stands.

However, needs evolve, right? Sheriff mentioned video and other technologies that are going to require looking to the future from a spectrum standpoint, and we can see that occurring now.

Mr. LANDSMAN. Do we need to adjust the language in the statute?

Mr. AGNEW. I will have to take that back.

Mr. LANDSMAN. Yeah, great. It wasn't a leading question. I just was curious.

Mr. DAME. If I could add, Congressman. I think under section 6 of the draft bill, it does address that particular problem by expanding the definition of the network beyond just the core and the RAM and includes spectrum bands, and it reflects reality. As Mr. Agnew mentioned—

Mr. LANDSMAN. Oh, I didn't put two and two—yeah, I do remember that, but I didn't put that together.

Mr. DAME. Right. And I think that particularly as 5G is predominant and we move into 6G, FirstNet Authority is going to need access to other bands that AT&T has available.

Mr. LANDSMAN. So you feel like that covers you?

Mr. DAME. I think having the authority to get access to those AT&T bands is important—

Mr. LANDSMAN. Yeah, that makes sense.

Mr. DAME [continuing]. And I think this definition does that, sir.

Mr. LANDSMAN. Last question. Sheriff, 2042, contract is up. We have made a \$15 billion investment as taxpayers. What do we own?

Sheriff ADKINSON. The infrastructure itself, as previously stated, belongs with AT&T. What we own is essentially a currency of trust, which says we have built a network that is what law enforcement officers trust or public safety, first responders trust. We don't own an infrastructure past that. We own a concept. We own, again, a situation where this has become the name, if you will.

I actually am afraid of a day that we look at not having one provider, because I think there is a risk. I am going to be honest with you. From my standpoint, I know that we—our job is to hold AT&T responsible, right? What I never want to happen—what I never, never want to happen is multiple companies going, "No, no, it is their fault that this didn't work. They didn't meet the standard."

Mr. LANDSMAN. Yeah. No, I agree with that piece. I think, on behalf of taxpayers, owning more than just the concept and trust is something that should be discussed, and I suspect AT&T would be, you know, eager to have that conversation just because—well, I ran out of time. Sorry. I didn't mean to put you on the spot, but I think it is important as we work to reauthorize.

Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thanks.

I will allow Mr. Agnew to respond if you want to.

Mr. AGNEW. No, we can get back. We can get back.

Mr. HUDSON. OK. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes Representative Houchin for 5 minutes for her questions.

Mrs. HOUCHIN. Thank you, Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, and the witnesses for your testimony.

FirstNet exists because on September 11, first responders ran toward danger with communications that were fragmented, incom-

patible, and overwhelmed. Congress created FirstNet to make sure that never happens again. And since then, FirstNet has come a long way with the nationwide build-out adoptions broad, including in my State in Indiana, and the network is evolving and working on more modernization efforts.

But today's hearing isn't about just patting ourselves on the back for the good work that we have done to get this far. It is about ensuring that public safety communications are not just proven on their best days but their worst days and that governance and accountability behind the system have to be equally reliable.

Over the summer, I met with first responders in Ripley County, Indiana, who spoke directly about why FirstNet matters. When communications are reliable and interoperable, they can share information faster, coordinate resources more effectively, and keep both first responders and the public safer.

The Ripley County Sheriff's Department has since sent a letter of support, supporting FirstNet reauthorizations and emphasizing that FirstNet has been a vital and reliable partner that improves officer safety and operational effectiveness during emergencies.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to request unanimous consent to submit that letter for the record.

Mr. HUDSON. Without objection, so ruled.

[The information appears at the conclusion of the hearing.]

Mrs. HOUCHIN. I want to applaud Representatives Dunn and McClellan for this reauthorization effort as we work to strengthen the governance, increase public safety, and maybe hope to futureproof our emergency communications technology.

There have been, I think, some concerns over the future of FirstNet that I just wanted to particularly ask Mr. Agnew. As we are working toward this interoperability, FirstNet has done a great job of this rollout, making sure it is deployed and it is also widely accepted.

Do you feel—where do you feel we are going in terms of the next reauthorization? What would put that interoperability at most risk?

Mr. AGNEW. So today, to clarify, the network is interoperable between other commercial providers. So that has been established. Where the network is and where it needs to go is to solve that land mobile radio/walkie-talkie integration, the legacy public safety networks that were so challenged during 9/11, which are still in use.

So we have technology. We have certified, validated, affordable technology in place today. That has got to be taken to the future. It is time for the next generation, highly affordable, highly scalable. It should not be hours, it should not be days for public safety to interoperate when Bloomington is supporting Indianapolis. It should just happen within seconds.

So that is the technology that we are deploying. We are held accountable for that. We signed a commitment to do it. So you have got this powerful public-private partnership of this willing technology company that has the skill set and the authority and oversight of the Government to ensure this happens, and that is what we signed up for.

We can't fail. We have to do it, and we are going to keep working until we get it right.

Mrs. HOUCHIN. Thank you.

Sheriff Adkinson, the same kind of question to you: What do you see are the challenges that we should be paying attention to in terms of interoperability, making sure that everybody can communicate with one another moving forward in the next generation of FirstNet?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I think the rate at which things are changing, the advancements in—what the expectations of the public is in regard to things like video, in regards to all the different devices that are required, we need to make sure that we set standards of what is acceptable and what is the performance measures that we are trying to get.

You know, we are talking about G. A G is about every 10 years, I think, before they replace them. So we are talking 5, but really we are starting to think 6, right? And what I don't want to do is for public safety to fall to the lowest common denominator. And so I want us to be constantly striving toward what is the best level of service that we can get provided.

Mrs. HOUCHIN. Thank you.

As I conclude here, I just want to note that FirstNet has made real progress. The trust in the network does depend on how things perform under stress, how it is governed when problems arise. So with the sunset approaching, I look forward to continuing to work together for ensuring that this network is resilient and ready for the next generation.

Thank you.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes Mr. Joyce for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. JOYCE. Thank you, Chairman Hudson and Ranking Member Matsui, for allowing me to enjoin this important hearing.

From the Gettysburg battlefields in Adams County to close to the Flight 93 Memorial in Somerset County, I am honored to represent a district that includes expansive rural territories. Unfortunately, geographic barriers create challenges for law enforcement and first responders. We saw that during 9/11.

FirstNet's important work to improve public safety across the entire United States gives law enforcement and first responders a necessary tool to operate seamlessly during these times of crisis, and it is essential that the FirstNet network is built out in a way that prioritizes rural areas that are underserved and so often overlooked.

More than 2,100 agencies in Pennsylvania representing thousands of FirstNet connections—this is a district that I represent, and a new cell tower was unveiled by FirstNet and AT&T in Huntington County in 2022. I was proud to be there for that event. This marked an important development in expanding access to rural broadband infrastructure.

However, over the years it has become difficult and increasingly clear that FirstNet's ability to share the tracking of FirstNet's build-out and the progress has been not very transparent to many of those of us who are concerned about that. And as we know, the contract between AT&T and the Federal Government that deter-

mines the milestones for rural build-out is a private one. The build-out date itself is also private.

Congress must exercise oversight of FirstNet to ensure that complete and timely build-out is taking place, especially in rural areas that need coverage desperately.

Mr. Agnew, can you describe the rural build-out milestones that FirstNet adheres to?

Mr. AGNEW. We are required to build out a 15 percent increase in rural build-out. We built out—we partnered with dozens of rural providers and built over 2,000 sites. We continue to partner with those rural providers to continue to expand.

Just to kind of take you through a journey. When the network was launched in 2017, the network coverage was 2.5 million square miles. As in my testimony, I said it is nearly 3 million square miles. That is a half million square miles, two sizes of Texas. Majority of that deployment has been in the rural areas.

Now, there is still more to go, and with the investment——

Mr. JOYCE. How can we track where that build-out in rural areas has——

Mr. AGNEW. Great question. That is a great question. So during the coverage workshops, it exposes where the network has gone and where the network is going. We also worked individually with each agency to expose that and see exactly where the build plan is, as well as they have their network status tool that they can look realtime at any moment to see where their network is going.

Mr. JOYCE. Mr. Dame, earlier in this hearing it was stated that NTIA has made the FirstNet contract available to this subcommittee. The contract has, unfortunately, been difficult to retrieve.

Can you commit to sending the FirstNet contract to this subcommittee by the end of next week, Friday, February 13?

Mr. DAME. Yes.

Mr. JOYCE. Thank you.

It is essential that Congress reauthorizes FirstNet's authority prior to its expiration. The future of public safety depends on it. The rural communities that I represent depend on it.

As we evaluate how to move forward, we must do so with transparency. We must do so with accountability and oversight at the forefront. We must be able to see the data to make sure that our rural communities are being prioritized in FirstNet's build-out and that the real milestones in the contract are both adequate and being adhered to.

Again, I thank you, Chairman Hudson, for allowing me to participate in this hearing, and I yield the remainder of my time.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

And the Chair now recognizes Mr. Kean for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today. And thanks as well to those who are here in uniform for your extraordinary public service.

This hearing is an important opportunity to examine the FirstNet framework and build on a successful industry standard model to ensure dynamic, reliable, and forward-looking public safety communications over the course of the next decade.

I agree with many of the statements that have already been made about the importance of clarity, precision, and robust oversight in FirstNet. Nothing less will suffice for our first responders and the challenges that they face daily.

I am committed to continue to work to ensure that first responders have a seat at the table by ensuring access to cutting-edge preempted communication, by reauthorizing FirstNet, or by ensuring that their existing systems remain accessible, interoperable, and reliable for as long as they are needed.

Reauthorizing FirstNet is an important step in continuing to fully implement lessons learned from the past so the tragedies of 9/11 that impacted so many families in New Jersey, impacted so many families across this country, will never, ever happen again.

Sheriff Adkinson, what do you think is the right metric for determining whether FirstNet is fulfilling its statutory mandate, and, if needed, how can Congress improve accountability to fulfilling this mandate in a reauthorization?

Sheriff ADKINSON. I think my take on this is there needs to be these indices that show a continued level of build-out and coverage enhancement each year. I think that should be provided in a manner that is readily available to Congress in a manner that you can see what has been built, where they are at, and I think it should be provided by the Authority on that basis.

Those are things that we have. Those are things that we can do. I think we need to set what are realistic expectations about when and how rural build-out should happen so that you know in advance. I think that is part of the problem, from my standpoint, is you have heard various Members today say, "Hey, my constituents, my district, where are we at?"

I don't always know 2 and 3 years in the future, but we certainly have some idea what is coming next. Let's be open about that. Let's be realistic about that and set expectations that the public can understand. Let's be transparent about it.

Mr. KEAN. Mr. Agnew, how well would you say that FirstNet has done in making sure decisions are driven by first responders themselves, and is there room for improvement?

Mr. AGNEW. There is always room for improvement. It is public safety's network. It has to continue to improve over the next 18, 17 years. It has to improve in coverage. It has to improve the amount of deployables. It has to improve the response times. It has to improve the technology.

That is not to say it hasn't been successful. It just has to keep getting better for public safety. It has to operate like public safety. Every event they go to, they get better. This network will get better.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you.

Mr. Dame, I will pose a similar question to you as I did to the sheriff: What lessons have we learned since FirstNet's inception, and what can we best use to improve organization, accountability so that FirstNet is providing the best service possible?

Mr. DAME. Thank you, Congressman. I think, at a minimum, Congress needs to seriously reauthorize FirstNet. As we have all learned, the market did not serve public safety responders before

FirstNet. There is now a very competitive market. Reauthorization would resolve that.

I think in terms of the metrics that you asked the sheriff for the network, I think the availability of the network and the performance of the network are two areas that really should be monitored closely.

Mr. KEAN. And as a followup, how can we best integrate the newest communications technology into the FirstNet program, and what are some examples of technologies that can be integrated in the future?

Mr. DAME. I mean, I think with future generations of technology, artificial intelligence, we are going to see unbelievable capabilities for first responders.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you.

And then the final question with Mr. Agnew: When we talk about interoperability, what options are available to first responders for interoperability with their existing hardware, including land mobile radios?

Mr. AGNEW. So, currently, commercial networks are interoperable with FirstNet. We have technology that allows for land mobile radio. We can provide you a much more in-depth discussion of exactly what the hardware is, but with Fusion and Fusion Link, it is going to take that hardware-based technology, put it in the cloud, make it so much easier to implement.

Mr. KEAN. OK. Thank you all for being here and as well for your public service and dedication to all of our fellow Americans.

I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

Seeing there are no further Members wishing to be recognized, I would like to thank our witnesses for your excellent testimony today. I think it will be extremely helpful to the committee moving forward.

I remind Members they have 10 business days to submit questions for the record, and I ask the witnesses to respond to those questions promptly. Members should submit their questions by the close of business on February 18, 2026.

Without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:14 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

[Material submitted for inclusion in the record follows:]

[DISCUSSION DRAFT]119TH CONGRESS
2ND SESSION**H. R.** _____

To amend the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 to
reauthorize the First Responder Network Authority, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. DUNN of Florida introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on _____

A BILL

To amend the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation
Act of 2012 to reauthorize the First Responder Network
Authority, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

4 (a) **SHORT TITLE.**—This Act may be cited as the
5 “First Responder Network Authority Reauthorization Act
6 of 2026”.

7 (b) **TABLE OF CONTENTS.**—The table of contents for
8 this Act is as follows:

G:\CMTE\EC\19\TELAR\FIRSTNET\FIRSTNET_02.XML

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.
 Sec. 2. Reauthorization of First Responder Network Authority.
 Sec. 3. Authority of NTIA over First Responder Network Authority.
 Sec. 4. Board of First Responder Network Authority.
 Sec. 5. Associate Administrator.
 Sec. 6. Components of nationwide public safety broadband network.
 Sec. 7. Flexibility in establishing fee amounts.
 Sec. 8. Reports to Congress on First Responder Network Authority.
 Sec. 9. Business continuity and disaster recovery plan.
 Sec. 10. Outage notifications.
 Sec. 11. Submission to Congress of FirstNet contract.
 Sec. 12. Definitions.

1 **SEC. 2. REAUTHORIZATION OF FIRST RESPONDER NET-**
 2 **WORK AUTHORITY.**

3 Section 6206 of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job
 4 Creation Act of 2012 (47 U.S.C. 1426) is amended—

5 (1) in subsection (f), by striking “the date that
 6 is 15 years after the date of enactment of this title”
 7 and inserting “September 30, 2037”; and

8 (2) in subsection (g)—

9 (A) by striking “Not later than 10 years
 10 after the date of the enactment of this Act”
 11 and inserting “Not later than 7 years after the
 12 date of the enactment of the First Responder
 13 Network Authority Reauthorization Act of
 14 2026”; and

15 (B) by striking “15-year sunset” and in-
 16 serting “termination”.

1 **SEC. 3. AUTHORITY OF NTIA OVER FIRST RESPONDER NET-**
2 **WORK AUTHORITY.**

3 (a) IN GENERAL.—Subtitle B of title VI of the Mid-
4 dle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 (47
5 U.S.C. 1421 et seq.) is amended—

6 (1) in section 6204(a), by striking “as an inde-
7 pendent authority”; and

8 (2) in section 6206—

9 (A) by redesignating subsections (d), (e),
10 (f), and (g) as subsections (e), (f), (g), and (h),
11 respectively;

12 (B) by inserting after subsection (c) the
13 following:

14 “(d) ACTIONS SUBJECT TO APPROVAL OF NTIA.—

15 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Any action taken by the
16 First Responder Network Authority shall be subject
17 to the approval of the NTIA.

18 “(2) MANNER OF APPROVAL.—

19 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180
20 days after the date of the enactment of this
21 subsection, the NTIA shall, after providing an
22 opportunity for public comment, develop a list
23 of actions that do not require prior approval by
24 the NTIA before the First Responder Network
25 Authority may take such an action. The First
26 Responder Network Authority may not take an

G:\CMTE\EC\19\TELAR\FIRSTNET\FIRSTNET_02.XML

4

1 action that, at the time when such action is
2 taken, is not on such list, unless the NTIA has
3 provided prior approval for such action.

4 “(B) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—Nothing
5 in subparagraph (A) may be construed to alter
6 the requirement of subsection (e) of section
7 6208 that fees may only be assessed under such
8 section if approved by the NTIA.”; and

9 (C) in subsection (h) (as so redesignated),
10 by striking “subsection (f)” and inserting “sub-
11 section (g)”.

12 (b) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 6205(b)(2)
13 of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of
14 2012 (47 U.S.C. 1425(b)(2)) is amended by striking “If”
15 and inserting “Subject to section 6206(d), if”.

16 (c) APPLICABILITY.—The amendments made by this
17 section shall apply with respect to actions taken by the
18 First Responder Network Authority on or after the date
19 on which the list required by subsection (d)(2) of section
20 6206 of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation
21 Act of 2012 (47 U.S.C. 1426), as amended by this Act,
22 is developed.

1 **SEC. 4. BOARD OF FIRST RESPONDER NETWORK AUTHOR-**
2 **ITY.**

3 (a) PUBLIC SAFETY PROFESSIONALS.—Section
4 6204(b)(2)(A) of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job
5 Creation Act of 2012 (47 U.S.C. 1424(b)(2)(A)) is
6 amended by amending clause (iv) to read as follows:

7 “(iv) ensure that, on and after the
8 date that is 3 years after the date of the
9 enactment of the First Responder Network
10 Authority Reauthorization Act of 2026, the
11 Board includes not fewer than 5 individ-
12 uals who have served as public safety pro-
13 fessionals.”.

14 (b) STAGGERED TERMS.—

15 (1) IN GENERAL.—Section 6204(c)(2) of the
16 Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of
17 2012 (47 U.S.C. 1424(c)(2)) is amended—

18 (A) in subparagraph (A)(ii), by striking “3
19 years” and inserting “not more than 3 years”;
20 and

21 (B) by striking subparagraph (D).

22 (2) APPLICABILITY.—The amendments made
23 by this subsection shall apply with respect to ap-
24 pointments made on or after the date of the enact-
25 ment of this Act.

1 **SEC. 5. ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR.**

2 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 6204 of the Middle Class
3 Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 (47 U.S.C.
4 1424) is amended by adding at the end the following:

5 “(h) ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR.—

6 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The First Responder Net-
7 work Authority shall have an Associate Adminis-
8 trator, which shall be a position in the Senior Execu-
9 tive Service and who shall be appointed by the As-
10 sistant Secretary.

11 “(2) DUTIES.—The Associate Administrator
12 shall do the following:

13 “(A) Subject to the direction of the Board
14 and approval by the NTIA under section
15 6206(d), manage the staff and operations of the
16 First Responder Network Authority in order to
17 ensure that the duties and responsibilities of
18 the First Responder Network Authority are ear-
19 ried out.

20 “(B) Serve as a liaison between the First
21 Responder Network Authority and the NTIA,
22 including with respect to ensuring compliance
23 by the First Responder Network Authority with
24 section 6206(d).

25 “(3) ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEWS.—The
26 NTIA, in consultation with the Chair of the Board

1 and any committee of the Board relating to govern-
2 ance and risk, shall conduct an annual performance
3 review of the Associate Administrator.”.

4 (b) CONTINUATION IN OFFICE.—The individual serv-
5 ing as the Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer
6 of the First Responder Network Authority on the day be-
7 fore the date of the enactment of this Act may serve as
8 the Associate Administrator under subsection (h) of sec-
9 tion 6204 of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation
10 Act of 2012 (47 U.S.C. 1424), as added by subsection
11 (a), on and after such date of enactment without the need
12 for appointment under such subsection (h).

13 **SEC. 6. COMPONENTS OF NATIONWIDE PUBLIC SAFETY**
14 **BROADBAND NETWORK.**

15 Section 6202(b) of the Middle Class Tax Relief and
16 Job Creation Act of 2012 (47 U.S.C. 1422(b)) is amend-
17 ed, in the matter preceding paragraph (1), by striking
18 “and initially consists of” and inserting “and consists of
19 such technologies, spectrum bands, and services as nec-
20 essary to enable secure, interoperable, resilient, and
21 prioritized broadband communications for public safety
22 entities, including”.”.

1 SEC. 7. FLEXIBILITY IN ESTABLISHING FEE AMOUNTS.

2 Section 6208(b) of the Middle Class Tax Relief and
3 Job Creation Act of 2012 (47 U.S.C. 1428(b)) is amend-
4 ed—

5 (1) by inserting “(or other period specified by
6 the First Responder Network Authority)” after “for
7 each fiscal year”; and

8 (2) by striking “the fiscal year involved” and
9 inserting “such fiscal year (or other period)”.

**10 SEC. 8. REPORTS TO CONGRESS ON FIRST RESPONDER
11 NETWORK AUTHORITY.**

12 (a) ADDITIONAL MATTERS TO BE INCLUDED IN
13 FIRST RESPONDER NETWORK AUTHORITY AUDIT RE-
14 PORT.—Section 6209(b)(2) of the Middle Class Tax Relief
15 and Job Creation Act of 2012 (47 U.S.C. 1429(b)(2)) is
16 amended—

17 (1) in subparagraph (B), by striking “; and”
18 and inserting a semicolon;

19 (2) in subparagraph (C), by striking the period
20 at the end and inserting “; and”; and

21 (3) by adding at the end the following:

22 “(D) an evaluation of the performance of
23 the FirstNet contractor under the contract in
24 building, operating, and maintaining the nation-
25 wide public safety broadband network.”.

1 (b) ANNUAL REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—Subtitle B of
2 title VI of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation
3 Act of 2012 (47 U.S.C. 1421 et seq.), as amended by the
4 preceding provisions of this Act, is further amended by
5 adding at the end the following:

6 **“SEC. 6214. ANNUAL REPORTS ON FIRST RESPONDER NET-**
7 **WORK AUTHORITY.**

8 “(a) REPORT ON CYBERSECURITY MATTERS.—The
9 NTIA shall submit to Congress an annual report that in-
10 cludes information on cyberattacks, outages, and cyber de-
11 fense efforts with respect to the nationwide public safety
12 broadband network. Each such annual report shall be sub-
13 mitted in unclassified form, but may contain a classified
14 annex.

15 “(b) REPORT ON ADOPTION RATES.—The NTIA
16 shall submit to Congress an annual report on adoption
17 rates, by profession and geographic area, with respect to
18 the nationwide public safety broadband network.”.

19 (c) ANNUAL BRIEFING.—Subtitle B of title VI of the
20 Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012
21 (47 U.S.C. 1421 et seq.), as amended by the preceding
22 provisions of this Act, is further amended by adding at
23 the end the following:

G:\CMTE\EC\19\TELAR\FIRSTNET\FIRSTNET_02.XML

10

1 **"SEC. 6215. ANNUAL BRIEFINGS ON FIRST RESPONDER**
2 **NETWORK AUTHORITY.**

3 "Not later than 1 year after the date of the enact-
4 ment of this section, and annually thereafter, the NTIA
5 shall provide to the Committee on Energy and Commerce
6 of the House of Representatives and the Committee on
7 Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate a
8 briefing on activities with respect to the First Responder
9 Network Authority."

10 **SEC. 9. BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND DISASTER RECOVERY**
11 **PLAN.**

12 Subtitle B of title VI of the Middle Class Tax Relief
13 and Job Creation Act of 2012 (47 U.S.C. 1421 et seq.),
14 as amended by the preceding provisions of this Act, is fur-
15 ther amended by adding at the end the following:

16 **"SEC. 6216. BUSINESS CONTINUITY AND DISASTER RECOV-**
17 **ERY PLAN.**

18 "(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after
19 the date of the enactment of this section, and every 5
20 years thereafter, the FirstNet contractor shall submit to
21 the NTIA for approval a business continuity and disaster
22 recovery plan to ensure rapid restoration of the nationwide
23 public safety broadband network following an outage re-
24 sulting from a natural disaster or other emergency.

25 "(b) TIMING OF APPROVAL OR REQUEST FOR RE-
26 SUBMISSION.—Not later than 180 days after the date on

1 which the NTIA receives a plan submitted under this sec-
2 tion, the NTIA shall—

3 “(1) approve such plan; or

4 “(2) provide to the FirstNet contractor a writ-
5 ten notice of—

6 “(A) the reasoning for not approving such
7 plan; and

8 “(B) the timeframe and process, as deter-
9 mined by the NTIA, for resubmitting such plan
10 for approval.”.

11 **SEC. 10. OUTAGE NOTIFICATIONS.**

12 Subtitle B of title VI of the Middle Class Tax Relief
13 and Job Creation Act of 2012 (47 U.S.C. 1421 et seq.),
14 as amended by the preceding provisions of this Act, is fur-
15 ther amended by adding at the end the following:

16 **“SEC. 6217. OUTAGE NOTIFICATIONS.**

17 “In the case of any outage with respect to the nation-
18 wide public safety broadband network—

19 “(1) as soon as practicable, but not later than
20 30 minutes, after the FirstNet contractor has con-
21 firmed such outage, the FirstNet contractor shall
22 notify the First Responder Network Authority of
23 such outage;

24 “(2) the FirstNet contractor shall provide to
25 the departments and agencies that use such network

1 a network status tool that provides timely informa-
 2 tion on such outage; and

3 “(3) after receiving a notification under para-
 4 graph (1), the First Responder Network Authority
 5 shall report such outage for purposes of the—

6 “(A) Network Outage Reporting System of
 7 the Federal Communications Commission; and

8 “(B) Disaster Information Reporting Sys-
 9 tem of the Federal Communications Commis-
 10 sion.”.

11 **SEC. 11. SUBMISSION TO CONGRESS OF FIRSTNET CON-**
 12 **TRACT.**

13 Subtitle B of title VI of the Middle Class Tax Relief
 14 and Job Creation Act of 2012 (47 U.S.C. 1421 et seq.),
 15 as amended by the preceding provisions of this Act, is fur-
 16 ther amended by adding at the end the following:

17 **“SEC. 6218. SUBMISSION TO CONGRESS OF FIRSTNET CON-**
 18 **TRACT.**

19 “Not later than 7 days after receiving a request, in
 20 writing, from the Chair and Ranking Member of the Com-
 21 mittee on Energy and Commerce of the House of Rep-
 22 resentatives, or from the Chair and Ranking Member of
 23 the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
 24 of the Senate, the First Responder Network Authority
 25 shall submit to such Committee any contract between the

1 First Responder Network Authority and the FirstNet con-
 2 tractor with respect to building, operating, or maintaining
 3 the nationwide public safety broadband network.”.

4 **SEC. 12. DEFINITIONS.**

5 Section 6001 of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job
 6 Creation Act of 2012 (47 U.S.C. 1401) is amended—

7 (1) by redesignating paragraphs (19) through
 8 (33) as paragraphs (21) through (35), respectively;

9 (2) by redesignating paragraphs (15) through
 10 (18) as paragraphs (16) through (19), respectively;

11 (3) by inserting after paragraph (14) the fol-
 12 lowing:

13 “(15) FIRSTNET CONTRACTOR.—The term
 14 ‘FirstNet contractor’ means the entity that, under
 15 contract with the First Responder Network Author-
 16 ity, builds, operates, and maintains the nationwide
 17 public safety broadband network.”; and

18 (4) by inserting after paragraph (19) (as so re-
 19 designated) the following:

20 “(20) INTEROPERABLE; INTEROPERABILITY.—

21 The terms ‘interoperable’ and ‘interoperability’ mean
 22 ensuring, and the ensuring of, respectively, commu-
 23 nications for public safety entities between networks,
 24 providers of commercial mobile service and commer-
 25 cial mobile data service, and jurisdictions through

1 the use of commercial standards for mission-critical
2 services, quality of service, and priority mecha-
3 nisms.”.

Documents for the Record – 02.04.26

1. A January 21, 2026, letter from police organizations to Chairman Guthrie.
2. A January 28, 2026, letter from the Bull Moose Project to Richard Hudson.
3. Testimony for the record from Thomas Schatz
4. A February 2, 2026, letter from Hamilton County Emergency Communications to the Committee.
5. A January 21, 2026, letter from National Grange.
6. A February 2, 2026, letter from the International Association of Fire Chiefs.
7. A February 3, 2026, letter from the National Fraternal Order of Police.
8. A January 16, 2026, letter from New Jersey State Fire Chief's Association.
9. Recommendations for Preserving the Federal FirstNet from public safety organizations.
10. A February 3, 2026, letter from the Taxpayers Protection Alliance to Subcommittee leadership.
11. A February 3, 2026, letter from PSBTA.
12. A letter from Lee H. Davidson, Chief Deputy of the Ripley County Sheriff's office.



The Honorable Brett Guthrie, Chairman
 The Honorable Frank Pallone, Ranking Member
 House Energy and Commerce Committee
 2125 Rayburn House Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20515

January 21, 2026

Dear Chairman and Ranking Member,

As your committee considers reauthorization legislation for the FirstNet Authority (FNA) prior to 2027, we urge you to consider critical updates that will improve the effectiveness of the program through enhanced oversight, accountability, competition, and transparency regarding the billions of dollars that it spends. To be clear, we strongly support the FirstNet concept and seek to improve its structure. Our primary objective in seeking these changes is to ensure that the FirstNet Authority is working to the benefit of *all* public-safety users.

Congress's original vision of FirstNet, a standalone, publicly-owned network exclusively for public safety use, was laudable. The reality of the effectiveness of this model is now apparent: it has not worked as envisioned. The reauthorization process represents an opportunity to improve this critical program.

First, it is imperative that any reauthorization measure does not permanently extend the FirstNet mandate. As we have seen over the past decade, technology and the needs of the public safety community have evolved dramatically. FirstNet should be revisited and updated over time, not put on a permanent autopilot. We urge that FirstNet's reauthorization remain on a Congressionally mandated cycle.

Second, we urge the Congress to ensure that the FirstNet program benefit all of public safety, not just the customers of a single commercial carrier. The fact that all of the FirstNet Authority's multi-billion-dollar spending has gone to only one carrier, AT&T, has been exposed as problematic in recent years. When the AT&T network went down in February of 2024, AT&T's FirstNet customers lost service. This is a risk our first responders simply cannot take. They need consistency and reliability for their communications networks. Many of our members now depend on multiple carriers to ensure reliability and resiliency. In the years since FirstNet's contract was awarded to AT&T, other carriers have developed their own public safety offerings. This competition has resulted in a better product for our public safety users. Congress should ensure that all infrastructure paid for with FNA funds is being used to the benefit of all public safety users, not just the customers of a single carrier.

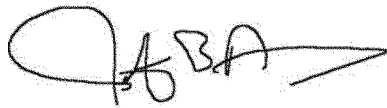
Accountability must also be prioritized in the new reauthorization measure. In recent years, the Inspector General for the Department of Commerce has issued multiple reports highlighting a lack of transparency and accountability within FirstNet and particularly with regard to AT&T's compliance with the FirstNet contract, including accusations that requested data was altered or not provided. This is unacceptable. To this end, we urge policymakers to include enhanced reporting and accountability requirements in the reauthorization measure, including:

- Reporting on the use and capacity of Band 14.
- Providing a full range and categorization of FirstNet subscribers including public safety, fire, EMS, private companies, etc.
- Disallow the use of government funds to support contractors, events, and marketing for any carrier.

Finally, we urge that policymakers include a provision that repeals grant/procurement requirements that favors AT&T given its exclusive partnership with FirstNet. This practice is outdated given the advancement of public safety communications options, and ultimately benefits a single corporate entity, not the public safety community.

As previously stated, our goal in making these recommendations is developing a stronger, more resilient public safety communications network. We believe that the experience of the past decade makes clear that changes must be made.

Sincerely,



Jeff Norman
Milwaukee Police Department
President, Major Cities Chiefs Association



Sheriff Chris West
Canadian County, OK
President, National Sheriffs' Association

CC: The Honorable Richard Hudson, Chairman, House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology

The Honorable Doris Matsui, Ranking Member, House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology

THE
**BULL
MOOSE**
PROJECT

January 28, 2026

Office of Congressman Richard Hudson
2112 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C.
20510

Dear Chairman Hudson:

September 11 saw emergency services from around the country volunteer to play a role in saving lives. But it also bore unfortunate witness to the fact that there was not, at the time, any platform to aid interoperability between state-based first responders. It took years — almost a decade — to fix this, but the hard work paid off with FirstNet's establishment in 2012, as part of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act.

FirstNet has operated as a self-described "fast lane" for public safety," ensuring that first responders' communications are prioritized. It also provides special online applications for information sharing, location services, and more. On top of this, the government successfully got private companies to buy in, specifically from AT&T, which has continued to launch cell sites and make other upgrades to the network.

This is easily the best of government: identifying a problem, coming together to create a bipartisan solution that actually works, and encouraging private industry to utilize their skills and technologies at no cost to the taxpayer. It is a model for how the government should act after a crisis.

But, as you know, congressional authorization for FirstNet is set to sunset in 2027, ending the program in its entirety. This would mean the near-decade of discussions and decade and a half of operation will all have been for naught.

Practically no one wants this to happen. The International Association of Chiefs of Police and the International Association of Fire Chiefs support it being permanently funded. The Congressional Fire Services Institute is in full support, as is the Government Accountability Office, which highlights \$15 billion in savings over its 15-year history. The Bull Moose Project, where I work as a policy analyst, has also called for FirstNet's renewal. And over a dozen more organizations sent a letter to congressional leaders earlier this year asking for FirstNet's ensured stability.

House leaders, including Rep. Brett Guthrie (R-KY) and Rep. Richard Hudson (R-NC), held a hearing in early September on next-gen 911 services, including on the necessity of reauthorizing

FirstNet. We are thrilled that the Senate is following suit. Witnesses at the House hearing, including sheriffs and public safety experts, agreed on the need to reauthorize FirstNet. And the representatives present seemed to concur with such a necessity, a good sign.

Congress has about a year to reauthorize FirstNet, and we believe The First Responder Network Authority Reauthorization Act is the perfect vehicle to get this done.

Back in 2012, there may have been a question as to whether or not FirstNet would work. In 2026, we know the answer: It works, and it works extremely well. We are thrilled that yourself, Congressman Guthrie, and the whole of the House of Representatives is taking this matter so seriously. Thank you for doing the work of the American people.

Sincerely,

Anthony J. Constantini
Policy Analyst, Bull Moose Project

House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
Hearing

Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization

Testimony for the Record

Thomas A. Schatz

President

Council for Citizens Against Government Waste

February 4, 2026

Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, and members of the committee, my name is Thomas A. Schatz, and I am the president of the Council for Citizens Against Government Waste (CCAGW). I offer this written testimony for your review and ask that it be included in the record regarding the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) and appreciate the committee's review of the program as part of the reauthorization process.

CCAGW is a private, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization representing more than one million members and supporters nationwide. Founded in 1984, CCAGW is the lobbying arm of Citizens Against Government Waste, which was established to follow up on the work of the President's Private Sector Survey on Cost Control, also known as the Grace Commission, to eliminate waste, fraud, abuse, mismanagement and inefficiency in government.

The lack of interoperability of first responders' communications systems was one of the reasons the 9/11 Commission included in its recommendations the need to provide "close coordination during an actual incident." The commission noted that, "The inability to communicate was a critical element at the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and Somerset County, Pennsylvania, crash sites, where multiple agencies and multiple jurisdictions responded. The occurrence of this problem at three very different sites is strong evidence that compatible and adequate communications among public safety organizations at the local, state, and federal levels remains an important problem."¹

Congress sought to address this problem by including the establishment of FirstNet in the 2012 Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act.² FirstNet received an allocation of \$7 billion from the AWS-3 spectrum auction to build a communications network solely dedicated for use by first responders.³ FirstNet was launched in 2018, and its authorization expires on February 22, 2027. Early consideration of reauthorization is critical to provide certainty for continued

¹ 9/11 Commission Report, Chapter 12, "What to Do? A Global Strategy,"

https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report_Ch12.pdf.

² Public Law 112-96, Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012, February 22, 2012,

<https://www.congress.gov/112/plaws/publ96/PLAW-112publ96.pdf>.

³ Stew Magnuson, "FirstNet Fully Funded After Lucrative Spectrum Auction," National Defense, April 1, 2015, <https://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2015/4/1/2015april-firstnet-fully-funded-after-lucrative-spectrum-auction>.

interoperability of communications among first responders so they can safely carry out their missions.

FirstNet is available in all 50 states, with customized plans for first responders.⁴ There are more than 7.5 million FirstNet connections, covering more than 2.99 million square miles.⁵ In 2024, FirstNet was used during the multi-agency efforts to combat the wildfires sweeping across western states, including the Park Fire in California; the Lee Falls Fire in Oregon; and the Pioneer Fire in Washington.⁶

The system has also enabled firefighters in Brooks County, Texas to deploy a SatCOLT vehicle with its own cell site in support of more than 40 agencies and public safety personnel; allowed the Oxford, Alabama, police department to obtain a compact rapid deployable, miniature cell tower to assist first responders during emergencies in more rural areas; and helped solve Elizabeth, Colorado's "patchy or nonexistent service" by installing mobile data terminals in ambulances and fire apparatus.⁷

On February 29, 2024, AT&T, the winning bidder for the FirstNet buildout, announced it would be paying more than \$5.1 billion over five years to the FirstNet Authority, which plans to use the funds to support the "\$8 billion commitment to enhance the nationwide public-safety broadband network (NPSBN) that is being built and maintained by AT&T." These sustainability investments by AT&T will total \$18 billion over the 25-year life of its contract with FirstNet Authority.⁸

Providing first responders with continued and improved interoperable communications is critical to their safety and the lives of those they are protecting and rescuing. They are the first to go into a dangerous situation and are often the last to leave. The brave Americans who serve as first responders should be thanked every day for their hard work and diligent service to the nation.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this written testimony. Reauthorization of FirstNet as soon as possible will help provide first responders the certainty that they will be able to continue to do their jobs to protect and save without having to worry about interoperable communications.

⁴ FirstNet Authority, "FirstNet: The History of our Nation's Public Safety Network," <https://firstnet.gov/about/history>.

⁵ FirstNet, Built with AT&T, "America's first responder network," <https://www.firstnet.com/>.

⁶ The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, "Park Fire," July 29, 2025, <https://www.fire.ca.gov/incidents/2024/7/24/park-fire>; Oregon Public Broadcasting, "Lee Falls Fire burns 280 acres, triggers evacuation order near Gaston," August 8, 2024, <https://www.opb.org/article/2024/08/08/lee-falls-fire-gaston/>; National Park Service, "North Cascades Park Closures: Fire Closures – Trail, Area, and Camp Closures," August 28, 2025, <https://www.nps.gov/noca/planyourvisit/fire-closures.htm>.

⁷ FirstNet Authority, "Episode 70: Fighting wildfires in Southern Texas with FirstNet," May 9, 2023, <https://firstnet.gov/newsroom/podcast/episode-70-fighting-wildfires-southern-texas-firstnet>; "Episode 66: Oxford Police leverages compact rapid deployable to boost emergency comms in Alabama," November 10, 2022, <https://firstnet.gov/newsroom/podcast/episode-66-oxford-police-leverages-compact-rapid-deployable-boost-emergency-comms>; "Communicating Across Colorado's Plains with FirstNet," June 4, 2024, <https://firstnet.gov/newsroom/blog/communicating-across-colorados-plains-firstnet>.

⁸ Donny Jackson, "AT&T filing with SEC outlines new payment schedule to FirstNet Authority," Urgent Communications, February 29, 2024, <https://urgentcomm.com/public-safety/at-t-filing-with-sec-outlines-new-payment-schedule-to-firstnet-authority>.



Board of Commissioners
 Alicia Reece
 Denise Driehaus
 Stephanie Summerow Dumas

Administrator
 Jeffrey W. Aluotto

Director
 Andrew Knapp

February 2, 2026

TO: House Subcommittee on Communications And Technology
 RE: Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization

I am writing on behalf of Hamilton County Emergency Communications to express our strong support for the FirstNet program and the reauthorization of the FirstNet Authority. We understand the House Energy & Commerce Communications and Technology Subcommittee has an upcoming hearing on FirstNet. Our agency relies on the FirstNet network, and we encourage you to support FirstNet Authority Reauthorization and the continued success of this critical public safety program.

We depend on FirstNet to help our responders reliably communicate during daily operations and during emergencies. Hamilton County is fortunate to support major events and venues, including MLB and NFL operations, that draw large crowds and can stress or congest cellular networks in localized areas. When first responders deploy into these environments, they must be able to rely on high-quality cellular voice and data to maintain situational awareness, coordinate response, and mitigate risk to the public and our personnel.

In addition, when Hamilton County has needed added support during high-profile incidents, FirstNet has consistently been there with boots on the ground to provide technology and resources that directly strengthen incident operations. From Towers on Wheels (COWs) to Compact Rapid Deployable (CRD) equipment, FirstNet's personnel and capabilities have answered the call and helped ensure successful outcomes for our community.

Timely action on FirstNet reauthorization is a public safety priority. FirstNet is critical to our state and nation's emergency readiness and response, which is why I respectfully urge you to support FirstNet Authority Reauthorization and the continued success of this program.

Thank you for your continued support of first responders and the communities we serve. Please feel free to contact me if I can be a resource to your office or provide additional local public safety perspective.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Knapp', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Andrew Knapp
 Director, Hamilton County Emergency Communications



NATIONAL GRANGE

Elevating rural interests since 1867

1616 H St. NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20006

January 21, 2026

Hello,

My name is Christine Hamp, and I'm President of the National Grange and a fourth-generation Granger who served as a chief officer in the fire service and more than 30 years in state and local government.



In light of the upcoming "On the Front Lines of Connectivity: Examining FirstNet's Role in Public Safety" hearing on Tuesday, January 27, I want to make sure that you saw my [op-ed](#) that was published in the [Spokesman Review](#) (see below), calling on Congress to reauthorize FirstNet. It sheds light on the importance of the reliable communications network designed by first responders for first responders, especially those living in rural areas.

Sincerely,

Christine E. Hamp, President
National Grange

THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

This column reflects the opinion of the writer.

[Learn about the differences between a news story and an opinion column.](#)

[OPINION](#) > [GUEST OPINION](#)

Christine E. Hamp: Public safety does not end at the city limits

Tue., Aug. 26, 2025



By **Christine E. Hamp**

Five years ago, the Bertschi Road Fire burned in Klickitat County in rural Washington state. The terrain was unforgiving, the flames unpredictable, and the first responders faced the added danger of having little to no cellular coverage. Communication was spotty at best, and without it, coordination can collapse, putting lives in danger.

But then, FirstNet made the difference. Crews deployed a Satellite Cell on Light Truck – a portable cell tower built specifically for first responders – and suddenly they had the lifeline they needed. That connection enabled firefighters to communicate with each other, share information, and ultimately contain and extinguish the fire.

I can't help but wonder: What if they hadn't had that tool? What if the fire burned unchecked because responders couldn't connect? The story could have ended in tragedy.

This is why Congress must reauthorize FirstNet – because it is the only nationwide public safety network designed by first responders, for first responders. When every second counts, there is no substitute.

Rural communities are all too familiar with this reality. Emergencies don't stop at the city limits – and neither should public safety. When disasters strike in small towns, on farms

or in remote canyons, families deserve the same protection as those in downtown neighborhoods.

FirstNet ensures that happens. It gives police, firefighters and emergency medical services secure, prioritized communications when commercial networks are overwhelmed or down. It provides deployable assets – trucks, drones and portable towers – that can be on the ground within hours. It even delivers coverage in places where cell service has never reached before. That’s not just progress; that’s lifesaving infrastructure.

I spent more than 30 years in public safety and local government, including several years on Type 1 and Type 3 incident management teams in northeast Washington and the Pacific Northwest. I have seen firsthand what happens when communication fails – and what happens when FirstNet succeeds. It has transformed emergency response.

And it’s not just for “the big one.” From wildfires to tornadoes, search-and-rescue to active shooters, FirstNet is the backbone that lets responders talk, coordinate, and protect lives every day. It even extends to utilities, transportation workers, and health care partners, because emergencies are never handled by one agency alone.

Here’s the bottom line: unless Congress acts, FirstNet’s authorization will expire in 2027. Walking away now would dismantle more than a decade of progress and put lives – especially rural lives – at risk.

The Grange was founded on the principle of giving voice to rural America. Today, that means speaking with one voice to say: FirstNet works, and we cannot afford to lose it.

Congress must rise to the occasion. Public safety is not negotiable, and it must not end at the city limits.

Christine E. Hamp is a Washington native, raised on a dairy farm. She is a fourth-generation Granger and served as a chief officer in the fire service for more than 30 years in state and local government. Hamp lives in a rural area west of Spokane, Washington, and serves as national president of National Grange.

THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW



International Association of Fire Chiefs

8251 Greensboro Drive, Suite 650 • McLean, VA 22102
Tel: 703.273.0911 • IAFC.org

February 2, 2026

The Honorable Brett Guthrie
Chairman
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Ranking Member
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Guthrie and Ranking Member Pallone:

Attached, please find principles for preserving the federal First Responder Network (FirstNet) Authority as agreed to by national organizations representing fire, emergency medical services, law enforcement, state and local emergency managers, and local governments. These organizations represent the Americans who use the federal FirstNet network every day.

We would like to request that these principles be included in the record of the February 4 hearing on the federal FirstNet network.

Thank you for your support for America's first responders!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S. Locke", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Fire Chief Steven Locke
First Vice President
International Association of Fire Chiefs

cc: The Honorable Richard Hudson, Chairman, House Committee on Energy and Commerce,
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology

The Honorable Doris Matsui, Ranking Member, House Committee on Energy and Commerce,
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology



PATRICK YOES
NATIONAL PRESIDENT

NATIONAL FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE®

328 MASSACHUSETTS AVE., N.E.
WASHINGTON, DC 20002

JIM PASCO
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

3 February 2026

The Honorable S. Brett Guthrie
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Frank J. Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Guthrie and Representative Pallone,

I am writing on behalf of the members of the Fraternal Order of Police to advise you of our strong support for the swift reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) in a way that upholds and bolsters its focus on public safety priorities. Our members, who serve on the front lines in communities throughout the nation, depend on FirstNet's reliable framework to perform their duties safely and effectively.

The foundation of FirstNet's success lies in its alignment with the practical demands of everyday public safety operations. This approach has positioned it as a benchmark for effective collaborations between government and private sectors. The FOP firmly backs the extension of FirstNet and initiatives to increase authentic representation from public safety leaders on its Board, with an emphasis on grassroots and local perspectives.

Created in 2012 within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), FirstNet has transformed emergency communications across the country. Following a competitive selection, AT&T emerged as the primary provider and secured a 25-year agreement in 2017. The network guarantees preferential treatment and override capabilities in crises, facilitating smooth collaboration among responders to safeguard lives and assets. With the February 2027 expiration quickly approaching, we commend the ongoing efforts to maintain this essential system for homeland security, crisis management, and routine public safety services.

FirstNet marks a significant leap forward in response capabilities, addressing the shortcomings revealed during the September 11, 2001, attacks. In partnership with AT&T, FirstNet now provides a specialized nationwide platform utilized by over 30,000 public safety groups and handling nearly eight million connections. Its reliability has been proven time and again in catastrophes, high-stakes events, and security operations. For instance, the December 2024 House Task Force analysis of the Butler, Pennsylvania, event emphasized that officers using FirstNet experienced no major disruptions in service, ensuring continuous high-priority links for numerous responders amid the turmoil. The Task Force's report noted that during the incident "law enforcement personnel with FirstNet cellular service did not have notable interference with their connectivity."

Ongoing legislative scrutiny has spotlighted FirstNet's accomplishments alongside areas ripe for enhancement. The 28 January 2026 Senate Subcommittee hearing on Telecommunications and Media, entitled "Frontline Connectivity: Assessing FirstNet's Impact on Public Safety," underscored its

-- BUILDING ON A PROUD TRADITION --



benefits while identifying paths for further development. Meanwhile, the House Committee's upcoming hearing, entitled "Assessing FirstNet: Effectiveness, Oversight, and Renewal," will have the opportunity to consider draft legislation, the "First Responder Network Authority Renewal Act" which will be introduced by Representatives Neal P. Dunn (R-FL) and Jennifer L. McClellan (D-VA).

The FOP acknowledges Congress's role in evaluating FirstNet's operations and identifying where improvements are needed. We will continue to share insights from law enforcement officers—whose lives depend on these critical communications systems—as deliberations proceed. We are, however, concerned that some provisions of the proposed bill might inadvertently weaken the key elements driving FirstNet's success. Certain clauses could impose redundant governmental oversight, heighten procedural burdens, and escalate expenses without tangible advantages for public safety. Overall, these alterations could blur FirstNet's primary objectives and introduce uncertainties that jeopardize emergency operations, community protection, and public safety.

The FOP supports robust accountability and transparency. Yet, elements of the draft could foster unnecessary administrative hurdles that slow down FirstNet's functionality. Its development and triumphs stem from direct responsiveness to users at the State and local levels.

FirstNet already faces rigorous scrutiny through yearly disclosures, evaluations, audits, and assessments by its Board, the Commerce Department's Inspector General, the GAO, Congress, NTIA, and the FCC. Introducing other redundancies would shift focus from technological advancements and upgrades to mere regulatory adherence, yielding no direct gains for public or officer safety.

Moreover, FirstNet operates in a vibrant market where rivals like Verizon Frontline and T-Mobile's priority services cater to many agencies. During last week's Senate hearing, Verizon's Cory Davis noted serving over 45,000 entities, including a dominant 61% in New Mexico. This rivalry highlights the need to keep FirstNet agile and dedicated.

Other provisions in the draft bill seem to broaden compatibility rules in manners that might compromise specialized systems and reduce priority for responders in critical moments. These issues recall the coordination gaps noted by the 9/11 Commission, which FirstNet was built to fix. Past Board Chairs have cautioned that integrating FirstNet into larger bureaucratic structures could revive old weaknesses, marginalize frontline input, and delay vital choices. Maintaining its standalone setup, with precise management tweaks, ensures it stays adaptable and attuned to safety needs.

Other provisions in the draft bill appear to expand interoperability mandates in ways that could erode dedicated infrastructure and dilute priority access for first responders during emergencies. This could impair Band 14's vital override functions, muddle leadership, and obscure responsibility lines. As Sheriff Michael Adkinson, Jr., Acting Chair of the FirstNet Authority (FNA) board, testified at the last week's Senate hearing, appropriate oversight is welcomed, but he cautioned against creating a diffusion of responsibility – what he described as a "tyranny of the commons...when it becomes everybody's responsibility it becomes no one's responsibility," which could weaken accountability and increase incentives to finger-point if failures occur.

As the committee begins consideration of this draft legislation, the FOP advises against unnecessary, overly prescriptive, or duplicative requirements that could hinder FirstNet's operational effectiveness. Proposals diverting investments from core improvements would erode the cost-effectiveness that has enabled taxpayer-free delivery of immense value to public safety.

-- BUILDING ON A PROUD TRADITION --



We encourage the Committees to consider a clean reauthorization that eliminates the expiration clause and confines adjustments to those proven to fortify FirstNet's safety-oriented purpose. Thank you for your guidance and dedication to those who protect our nation. The FOP stands ready to further engage with the committee.

On behalf of the more than 382,000 members of the Fraternal Order of Police, I thank you all for taking into consideration our views on this matter. If I can provide any additional information about this bill, please do not hesitate to contact me or Executive Director Jim Pasco in our Washington, D.C. office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick Yoes", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Patrick Yoes
National President

cc: Scott Hildebrand, President, Kentucky State Lodge
Shawn Helbig, National Trustee, Kentucky State Lodge
Bob Fox, President, New Jersey State Lodge
Kevin Vernon, National Trustee, New Jersey State Lodge



New Jersey State Fire Chief's Association

January 16, 2026

President
Frank Walters
311 Centre Avenue
Secaucus, NJ 07094
(201) 774-5660
E-mail:
FWalters@njchiefs.com

First Vice President
Robert Morris
2 Maryland Avenue
Whiting, NJ 08759
(732)232-1061
RMorris@njchiefs.com

Second Vice President
George Meredith
446 Broad Street
Beverly, NJ 08010
(609)694-9827
E-mail:
GMeredith@njchiefs.com

Secretary
Christopher H. Assenheimer
444 Central Avenue
Carlstadt, NJ 07072-1524
(201) 438-2603
E-mail:
CAssenheimer@njchiefs.com

Treasurer
Brian Valentino
103 Pension Road
Manalapan, NJ 07726-8401
(732)904-2953
Email:
BValentino@njchiefs.com

www.njchiefs.com

The Honorable Brett Guthrie
Chair, House Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Richard Hudson
Chair, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Subject: Support for Reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority

Dear Chair Guthrie and Chair Hudson:

Since 1905, The New Jersey Fire Chiefs Association has represented over 6000 fire service leaders from agencies across the state. Our members are committed to advancing the protection of life, property, and the environment through leadership, education, and advocacy. On behalf of our members, I write to express our strong support for the reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority).

As leaders of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce and its Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, you play a central role in ensuring the continuity and advancement of the nation's only dedicated public safety broadband network.

The FirstNet Authority was established by Congress in 2012 following communication challenges identified during major national emergencies, including the September 11, 2001, attacks. Congress created the FirstNet Authority within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to provide first responders with a secure, interoperable, and resilient communications network designed specifically for public safety operations.



New Jersey State Fire Chiefs Association

President
 Frank Walters
 311 Centre Avenue
 Secaucus, NJ 07094
 (201) 774-5660
 E-mail:
FWalters@njchiefs.com

First Vice President
 Robert Morris
 2 Maryland Avenue
 Whiting, NJ 08759
 (732)232-1061
RMorris@njchiefs.com

Second Vice President
 George Meredith
 446 Broad Street
 Beverly, NJ 08010
 (609)694-9827
 E-mail:
GMeredith@njchiefs.com

Secretary
 Christopher H. Assenheimer
 444 Central Avenue
 Carlstadt, NJ 07072-1524
 (201) 438-2603
 E-mail:
CAssenheimer@njchiefs.com

Treasurer
 Brian Valentino
 103 Pension Road
 Manalapan, NJ 07726-8401
 (732)904-2953
 Email:
BValentino@njchiefs.com

www.njchiefs.com

Since its inception, the FirstNet Authority has successfully met its congressional mandate. The nationwide network was completed on schedule and within budget, providing reliable, prioritized, and preemptive broadband communications to more than 30,000 public safety agencies across approximately 3.0 million square miles of coverage. It operates under a fiscally responsible, self-sustaining funding model, requiring no ongoing appropriations from Congress. It has been called the single most successful public private partnership in America.

The oversight structure of the FirstNet Authority Board, which includes both public safety and industry leaders, ensures accountability, transparency, and continued innovation. The Authority's success has resulted in a trusted ecosystem of public safety applications, devices, and solutions that enhance situational awareness and coordination during complex incidents.

Reauthorization of the FirstNet Authority before the 2027 deadline is essential to maintaining the operational integrity and modernization of this network. The United States Government Accountability Office has emphasized that failure to reauthorize the Authority would jeopardize the sustainability of the network and undermine the confidence of the first responder community.

New Jersey's fire service community has witnessed firsthand the operational value of FirstNet during response to numerous man-made, and natural disasters, along with numerous other everyday incidents both large and small. The ability to maintain dependable, prioritized communications across jurisdictions and disciplines has strengthened emergency response capabilities and saved many lives.

The New Jersey Fire Chiefs Association respectfully urges the Committee and Subcommittee to take prompt action to reauthorize the First Responder Network Authority. Doing so will reaffirm Congress's commitment to public safety and ensure that America's first responders continue to have the reliable and interoperable communications network they need to protect the communities they serve.



New Jersey State Fire Chiefs' Association

President
Frank Walters
311 Centre Avenue
Secaucus, NJ 07094
(201) 774-5660
E-mail:
FWalters@njchiefs.com

First Vice President
Robert Morris
2 Maryland Avenue
Whiting, NJ 08759
(732)232-1061
RMorris@njchiefs.com

Second Vice President
George Meredith
446 Broad Street
Beverly, NJ 08010
(609)694-9827
E-mail:
GMeredith@njchiefs.com

Secretary
Christopher H. Assenheimer
444 Central Avenue
Carlstadt, NJ 07072-1524
(201) 438-2603
E-mail:
CAssenheimer@njchiefs.com

Treasurer
Brian Valentino
103 Pension Road
Manalapan, NJ 07726-8401
(732)904-2953
Email:
BValentino@njchiefs.com

www.njchiefs.com

Sincerely,

Frank J. Walters
President
New Jersey Fire Chiefs Association

Cc via Email:

Representative Tom Kean, Jr.
Dan Scharfenberger, Chief of Staff
dan.scharfenberger@mail.house.gov

Oliver McIntosh, Telecom Legislative Assistant
oliver.mcintosh@mail.house.gov

Dan Butler, Legislative Director
dan.butler@mail.house.gov

Erin D'Auria, Director
erin.dauria@mail.house.gov

Representative Rob Menendez
Yujin Lee, Chief of Staff
yujin.lee@mail.house.gov

Georgia McLean, Telecom Legislative Assistant
georgia.mclean@mail.house.gov

Alexandria Musser, Legislative Director
alexandria.musser@mail.house.gov



New Jersey State Fire Chief's Association

President

Frank Walters
311 Centre Avenue
Secaucus, NJ 07094
(201) 774-5660
E-mail:
FWalters@njchiefs.com

First Vice President

Robert Morris
2 Maryland Avenue
Whiting, NJ 08759
(732) 232-1061
RMorris@njchiefs.com

Second Vice President

George Meredith
446 Broad Street
Beverly, NJ 08010
(609) 694-9827
E-mail:
GMeredith@njchiefs.com

Secretary

Christopher H. Assenheimer
444 Central Avenue
Carlstadt, NJ 07072-1524
(201) 438-2603
E-mail:
CAssenheimer@njchiefs.com

Treasurer

Brian Valentino
103 Pension Road
Manalapan, NJ 07726-8401
(732) 904-2953
Email:
BValentino@njchiefs.com

www.njchiefs.com

Jeremy Julis, Director
jeremy.julis@mail.house.gov

Representative Frank Pallone

Liam Fitzsimmons, Chief of Staff
liam.fitzsimmons@mail.house.gov

James Johnson, Legislative Director and Telecom Legislative Assistant
james.johnson@mail.house.gov

Matthew Montekio, Director
matthew.montekio@mail.house.gov

Senator Andy Kim

Amy Pfeiffer, Chief of Staff
amy_pfeiffer@kim.senate.gov

Lily Antonowicz, Legislative Assistant for Telecom
lily_antonowicz@kim.senate.gov

Kelly Boyer, Deputy Chief of Staff
kelly_boyer@kim.senate.gov



Recommendations for Preserving the Federal FirstNet Network

1. Length of Extension of Sunset of FirstNet Authority

1. Extend the sunset for 10 – 20 years.
2. Do not set the sunset date at the same time as the FirstNet contract renewal (15 years extension) – it creates too much uncertainty in changes in conditions of the contract during the federal contracting process.
 1. Preferably aim for the sunset to expire on September 30 (the end of a fiscal year) and not during an election year.
 2. Establish a recurring 10-year renewal of the First Responder Network Authority's authorization, contingent upon the Secretary's confirmation that it has fulfilled its statutory duties and subject to congressional oversight.

2. Redlines About Federal FirstNet Governance to Protect

1. Maintain the authority of the federal FirstNet Board.
 - i. It has representatives from public safety; the federal government; and industry.

1. Congress should consider adding the NTIA Administrator to the FirstNet Board (as a representative of the Department of Commerce).
 2. NTIA should ensure geographical diversity to the FirstNet Board.
 3. NTIA should return to setting up staggered terms for the FirstNet Board members.
 4. For the Cabinet-level officials on the FirstNet Board, they should be required to attend or send Executive Schedule official as a designate.
2. Maintain the role of the Public Safety Advisory Committee.
1. It speaks for the public safety end users of the network and provides important guidance to the FirstNet Board members.
 2. The PSAC should not be designated as a FACA committee to ensure candid discussions between the PSAC members, the federal FirstNet staff, and the contractor of the NPSBN, which is AT&T.
 3. NTIA should work to improve the business processes for federal FirstNet.
 1. It is important that staffing and financial decisions (and financial transactions) should be administered in an efficient manner, so that the federal FirstNet network can be managed as efficiently as a commercial network (actually, more efficiently, because the federal FirstNet network is a life safety system for use during emergencies).
 2. The AT&T sustainability payments should be used for improvements to maintain and improve the federal FirstNet network.
3. The contract should not be renegotiated mid-contract nor should non-contracted carriers be allowed access to the federal FirstNet core.
1. The federal FirstNet network already can share voice and text data with other carriers.
 2. The federal FirstNet network's requirements for priority access and ruthless preemption remain key components of the network.
4. Federal FirstNet should continue to be required to modernize the network and maintain its ability to adapt to new technology, including upgrading the 5G core and eventually evolving the network to 6G capability.



February 3, 2026

The Honorable Richard Hudson
Chair
House Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications and
Technology
United States House of Representatives
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Doris Matsui
Ranking Member
House Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Communications and
Technology
United States House of Representatives
2323 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, and Members of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology,

The Taxpayers Protection Alliance (TPA) writes today to urge you to support the reauthorization of FirstNet. TPA is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to educating the public through research and analysis about the government's impact on consumers, taxpayers, and the economy.

The network (known formally as the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network) was created in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, during which emergency communications faltered and hindered the public safety response. FirstNet has received tremendous support from first responders, with 7.5 million users from more than 30,000 agencies, and covers more than 3 million square miles of the U.S. There is no federal mandate to subscribe to FirstNet, as a competition implied during the January 28 Senate hearing on the reauthorization of the network. Instead, public safety agencies only subscribe to FirstNet if they choose the network over alternative providers.

The network has played a critical role during large-scale emergency situations. For example, during the July 2025 flash floods in Texas, the FirstNet Response Operations Group responded to more than a dozen requests from public safety agencies to deploy portable cell sites to aid in response and recovery efforts, [AT&T reported](#).

Jeffrey Ackerman, chief of police in Duck, North Carolina, said FirstNet was key during the response to Hurricane Helene in 2024, [stating](#) that "with reliable connectivity on FirstNet, we were able to communicate with our team and other agencies while in remote areas. From search

Taxpayers Protection Alliance, 1101 14th Street, NW, Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 20005
(202) 930-1716
www.protectingtaxpayers.org



and rescue to welfare checks and even connecting an isolated resident to her husband, FirstNet helped us better serve the local community.”

Public safety organizations have lined up in support of the reauthorization effort, asking that FirstNet continue as-is. In a [joint letter](#), the National Fraternal Order of Police and International Association of Fire Fighters rejected ideas by critics that FirstNet is no longer sufficient to meet the needs of public safety. “Our members who depend on FirstNet have confidence in their communication systems – and it is their lives that are at stake,” they wrote. “Our concern is that for-profit companies are seeking to enrich their shareholders by hindering or blocking our reauthorization efforts.”

While Congress initially allocated \$7 billion to fund the network, the money coming from spectrum auctions by the Federal Communications Commission, FirstNet has since become self-sufficient. AT&T agreed to invest \$40 billion over the 25-year contract to build, operate and maintain the network, making annual payments to the FirstNet Authority for usage of licensed spectrum in Band 14. A competitor implied during the Senate hearing that FirstNet is a government-owned network, but given AT&T’s own investment into the network that isn’t true.

Some lawmakers have proposed moving the FirstNet Authority under the auspices of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration, but this would create unnecessary bureaucracy and erode the initial structure authorized by Congress of independent governance.

As the adage goes, if it isn’t broke don’t fix it. That is especially true for a rare government program that is self-sufficient and doesn’t use taxpayer dollars. Congress should reauthorize FirstNet as it currently operates.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David Williams", written in a cursive style.

David Williams
President

Taxpayers Protection Alliance, 1101 14th Street, NW, Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 20005
(202) 930-1716
www.protectingtaxpayers.org



February 03, 2026

Electronic Mail

The Honorable Brett Guthrie, Chairman
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Richard Hudson, Chairman
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Guthrie and Chairman Hudson:

On behalf of the Public Safety Broadband Technology Association (PSBTA), we appreciate the Committee's leadership in convening a legislative hearing on the reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet). The decisions before Congress will have long term impacts for the safety of first responders and the communities they serve.

That is why reauthorization language now circulating on Capitol Hill is so deeply disappointing. After years of success and operational reliability, this language does not build on achievement. It threatens to unravel the framework that made FirstNet effective.

The bill language before Congress seeks to eliminate the FirstNet Authority independent status and place it inside the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), shifting control of a life-saving network to someone who has never been on the frontlines. It adds political layers between first responders and the network they rely on, weakening public safety influence and slowing decisions. For a network designed to serve critical missions, this bureaucratic approach is unnecessary; moreover, it is seriously misguided.

To ensure the legislative record fully reflects the operational truths and governance needs of FirstNet, PSBTA respectfully urges the Committee to ask the following questions of the Acting Chair, Sheriff Mike Adkinson of the FirstNet Authority Board, on the record and under oath, during the hearing on Wednesday:

- With respect to hiring, evaluating, assessing, directing, or terminating the FirstNet Executive Director/CEO or FirstNet Authority staff, what role do you, as Board Chair, or the Board collectively, have?

PSBTA Letter to Chairman Guthrie and Chairman Hudson – December 15, 2025 – Page 2.

- As highlighted in a recent Office of Inspector General (OIG) report, there were allegations of whistleblower retaliation and interference with OIG activities:
 - What role did you or the Board have in hiring, managing, directing, or assessing the prior Executive Director?
 - When did you first become aware of these allegations?
- What role did the Board play in the hiring of the current Executive Director?
- Does the FirstNet Authority currently have sufficient personnel resources to implement the corrective actions or improvements identified in recent OIG reports?
- The FirstNet Authority's FY 2026 budget includes substantial funds that were on hand during FY 2025 but were not invested and instead carried over. Is this carryover typical, or was there a specific reason these funds were not invested in the network during FY 2025?
 - Do you anticipate similar carryovers occurring again in FY 2026?

Taken together, the responses to these questions should demonstrate overwhelmingly to the Committee and all of Congress that maintaining oversight and decision making authority within the independent FirstNet Authority Board, rather than NTIA, is essential to protecting the public safety mission, preserving operational integrity, and safeguarding the lives of first responders and the residents of hometown communities they serve every day.

FirstNet funding must remain dedicated exclusively to building, operating, and improving the nationwide public safety broadband network for which it was authorized.

We respectfully urge the Committee to ensure that reauthorization legislation preserves the Authority's independence. If any changes were to be made, it would be to strengthen the decision-making authority of the FirstNet Authority Board with respect to management and oversight according to its original design. This governance has created what is widely regarded by public safety organizations as one of the most successful public private partnerships in the history of the United States, and it is improving every day.

Respectfully submitted,



John Paul Jones, Fire Chief-Emeritus
Executive Director, Public Safety Broadband Technology Association

cc: Members, House Committee on Energy and Commerce



210 N. Monroe St.
Versailles, IN 47042
sheriff@ripleycounty.com

Rob Bradley
Sheriff

Office (812) 689-5558
Dispatch (812) 689-5555
FAX (812) 689-5418

SUBJECT: Support for Reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet)

We understand the House E&C Communications Subcommittee has an upcoming hearing on FirstNet. We rely on the FirstNet network and support FirstNet Authority Reauthorization. We encourage Representative Erin Houchin to support the FirstNet program's continued success.

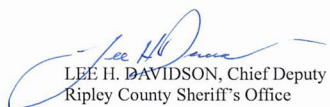
As a largely rural county, Ripley County faces unique public safety communications challenges, including limited commercial coverage, geographic isolation, and the need to coordinate multi-agency responses across jurisdictional boundaries. FirstNet has proven to be a vital and reliable communications platform that directly enhances officer safety, operational effectiveness, and our ability to protect the public—particularly during emergencies, large-scale incidents, and natural disasters when commercial networks are often congested or unreliable.

FirstNet's priority and preemption capabilities ensure that law enforcement, fire, EMS, and emergency management personnel can maintain uninterrupted communications during critical incidents. This interoperability is essential for coordinated multi-agency response efforts, especially in rural environments where resources are limited and response times can be impacted by distance and terrain.

In 2023, the Ripley County Sheriff's Office relied on FirstNet technology during a search and rescue operation to transmit critical data to analysts located off site. Using FirstNet communications equipment, we were able to securely and reliably send digital imagery for analysis. Without the FirstNet communications equipment and network reliability, we would have been unable to utilize this critical resource, significantly impacting the effectiveness of the mission.

This real-world application underscores the importance of a dedicated, public-safety-focused broadband network. FirstNet is not simply a convenience—it is an operational necessity that enables advanced technologies, improves situational awareness, and strengthens outcomes during life-safety incidents.

Reauthorizing the FirstNet Authority will ensure continued investment, innovation, and long-term stability in a communications system purpose-built for first responders. We respectfully urge your support for this reauthorization and appreciate your continued commitment to strengthening public safety communications for communities across Indiana and the nation.


LEE H. DAVIDSON, Chief Deputy
Ripley County Sheriff's Office

2/2/26

Sheriff Michael Adkinson**House Energy and Commerce Committee Questions for the Record, February 2026:****Attachment —Additional Questions for the Record****The Honorable Gus Bilirakis****1. Why did the R.F.P. for FirstNet call for a single provider to build the network?**

The Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-96) required the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority) to deploy a single, nationwide public safety broadband network (NPSBN) based on a single national architecture through a public-private arrangement. While the statute did not explicitly mandate a single contractor, its structure strongly favored a unified nationwide deployment model.

Before issuing the final request for proposals (RFP), the FirstNet Authority conducted extensive market research, including 13 Requests for Information, two industry days, vendor engagement, state level consultations, and release of a draft RFP. Industry feedback and acquisition analysis indicated that a single-award, objectives-based contract would best achieve the statutory mandate.

Following a thorough examination of the record in response to its market research efforts, the FirstNet Authority determined that a single provider model would:

- Reduce integration and interoperability risks across 56 states and territories
- Simplify accountability under a 25-year public-private partnership
- Enable full valuation and integration of Band 14 spectrum
- Transfer significant financial risk to the private sector
- Leverage existing commercial infrastructure to accelerate deployment
- Promote nationwide consistency in cybersecurity, priority/preemption, pricing, devices, and rural coverage
- Maximize economies of scale for both the contractor and the government through unified deployment and lifecycle management.

A fragmented, multi-award structure was viewed as amplifying technical complexity, administrative burden, and financial risk, particularly given the statutory state opt-out framework and the need for a single interoperable core network.

The single-award model therefore aligned statutory direction, industry input, financial sustainability, and operational requirements into a scalable nationwide solution for public safety. By consolidating responsibility for the core, the radio access network, and long-term evolution of the system, the single-award approach reduced fragmentation, strengthened accountability, and enabled consistent interoperability across all states and territories. This structure also positioned the network to evolve more efficiently over time, with a single entity responsible for technology

upgrades, security posture, and integration of emerging capabilities—an essential factor for a mission-critical system expected to serve diverse agencies for decades.