

**PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS IN THE UNITED  
STATES**

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**HEARING**  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND  
TECHNOLOGY  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND  
COMMERCE  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
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# **PUBLIC SAFETY COMMUNICATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES**

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2025**

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:17 a.m., in the John D. Dingell Room 2123, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Richard Hudson (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Members present: Representatives Hudson, Allen, Latta, 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, Kelly, Barragán, Carter of Louisiana, Menendez, Landsman, McClellan, Castor, and Pallone (ex officio).

Also present: Representatives Joyce and Mullin.

Staff present: Ansley Boylan, Director of Operations; Christian Calvert, Press Assistant; Jessica Donlon, General Counsel; Sydney Greene, Director, Finance and Logistics; Kate Harper, Chief Counsel, Communications and Technology; Megan Jackson, Staff Director; Noah Jackson, Clerk, Communications and Technology; Sophie Khanahmadi, Deputy Staff Director; John Lin, Senior Counsel, Communications and Technology; Joel Miller, Chief Counsel; Elaina Murphy, Professional Staff Member, Communications and Technology; Dylan Rogers, Professional Staff Member; Jackson Rudden, Staff Assistant; Chris Sarley, Member Services/Stakeholder Director; Matt VanHyfte, Communications Director; Jane Vickers, Press Assistant; Hannah Anton, Minority Policy Analyst; Parul Desai, Minority Chief Counsel, Communications and Technology; Waverly Gordon, Minority Deputy Staff Director and General Counsel; Tiffany Guarascio, Minority Staff Director; Dan Miller, Minority Professional Staff Member; Emma Roehrig, Minority Staff Assistant; Michael Scurato, Minority FCC Detailee; Johanna Thomas, Minority Counsel; Jackson Hall, Intern; and Shae Reinberg, Intern.

Mr. HUDSON. The subcommittee will come to order. The Chair will recognize 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 hearing, "Public Safety Communications in the United States." Looking forward to hearing

from our witnesses about the need for our first responders and how to improve communication—oh, there it goes.

I pushed the wrong button. I think I pushed your button. I don't know what I pushed. Oh, OK. Someone got struck with lightning backstage.

But I am looking forward to hearing from our witnesses about the needs of our first responders and how to improve communications for our public safety.

I want to start by taking a moment of personal privilege and recognizing our chief counsel, Kate Harper. Today is her last day working for the committee. We are bittersweet but excited for her. She starts a new job after an incredible career on the Hill, 6 of those years with our great Committee on Energy and Commerce.

Kate has a lot to be proud of in her time here: finding a nearly impossible deal for our spectrum auction in this year's reconciliation bill, working on keeping our kids safe from TikTok's Chinese ownership, and finding ways to expand broadband for all Americans. She has been invaluable to the progress and growth of our subcommittee and subcommittee members, myself especially. And I know that I can attribute a lot of my success, probably all of my success as chairman, to her and her hard work.

So I am looking forward to seeing her grow in her career and, more importantly, as her family grows. So thank you, Kate, for your wonderful service to this committee. We wish you all the best.

Now I will recognize our ranking member, Ms. Matsui, for as much time as she may consume.

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

I also from this side of the aisle very much applaud Kate's efforts and everything else that we have been doing on this committee and, quite frankly, the importance of us all working together on this too.

And I applaud the fact that we have been making progress on certain areas, and I know that we have you to thank for that. And so service is so important, I believe, for all of us on this committee, and I really believe what we do in this committee really does resound beyond this committee. And we thank all the people who work on this committee in order to do this.

So thank you very much, Kate. Really, really, really appreciate it. Thank you.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you for that.

Listen, communication systems are crucial for our public safety organizations. Our first responders need reliable communications to be able to answer calls for help. We have unfortunately experienced many instances where our public safety communications didn't work, and the consequences were devastating.

During the horrific terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11th, 2001, the anniversary of which is this week, our communications networks were overloaded, resulting in calls being dropped or not going through.

More recently, although significantly improved from 2001, in my home State of North Carolina, we felt the severe impacts from Hurricane Helene's devastation, ultimately preventing people from being able to call 9-1-1 and receiving lifesaving care.

These are just two examples of major events where a lack of public safety communication cost hundreds and thousands of lives.

Today's first responder communication landscape looks vastly different than that of 2001. After 9/11, Congress stood up the 9/11 Commission, which released recommendations to prepare for and guard against future attacks. One of those recommendations led to Congress establishing the First Responder Network Authority, or FirstNet, a nationwide broadband network specifically built for public safety.

FirstNet was allocated 20 megahertz of spectrum and \$7 billion to build out the networks in all 50 States and territories. In 2017, AT&T was selected to deploy this network, and since then, other providers offer competitive services to serve public safety.

With FirstNet's statutory authority set to expire in 2027, it is time for Congress to assess the progress made by FirstNet to ensure that all requirements are being met and it is adequately serving the needs of our public safety community.

Additionally, our 9-1-1 call centers are working to deploy advanced technology known as Next Generation 9-1-1. Next Generation 9-1-1 is a critical technology upgrade for our first responders, and I have been a longtime supporter of this deployment nationwide.

This internet protocol-based system at our 9-1-1 call centers will open the door for advanced tools for both the public and our first responders to use.

NG 9-1-1-equipped centers are able to receive text messages, photos, and videos to help aid response efforts. This technology also allows for seamless integration of artificial intelligence for cybersecurity purposes and to aid call takers in times of large call volume or provide real-time language transcription or even translation.

Once fully deployed, NG 9-1-1 will be able to provide specific geolocation data for wireless callers known as dispatchable location. This accurate location will let first responders know the exact location of a caller automatically instead of just the nearest cell tower.

Similar technologies are also being implemented to transmit vertical location data, which can help first responders locate the exact floor of someone in a high-rise building. Equipping our first responders with this information can improve response times and help save lives.

Importantly, this technology allows calls to be transferred or rerouted to other call centers in the event a call center is taken offline due to an outage or a natural disaster.

Our public safety and law enforcement officers put their lives on the line every day to help us in our times of need, and we must make sure they have the best tools available to do their jobs. Today, we will hear from our witnesses about the state of public safety communications and whether public safety needs are being met. We will hear about the tools and technologies that are most effective for them to do their job and where improvements can be made.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today about these issues and how Congress can stand ready as a partner.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Hudson follows:]

**Opening Statement for Chairman Richard Hudson  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
“Public Safety Communications in the United States”  
Tuesday, September 9, 2025, at 10:15 AM**

**Introduction**

Good morning, and welcome to today’s hearing on the state of public safety communications in the United States. I am looking forward to hearing from our witnesses about the needs of our first responders and how to improve communications for public safety.

I want to start by recognizing our Chief Counsel, Kate Harper, as she starts a new job after an awesome career on the Hill, six of those years with our great Committee on Energy and Commerce.

Kate has a lot to be proud of in her time here – finding a nearly impossible deal for our spectrum auction in this year’s reconciliation bill, working on keeping our kids safe from TikTok’s Chinese ownership, and finding ways to expand broadband for all Americans.

She has been invaluable to the progress and growth of our subcommittee and sub members and I know I can contribute much of our success to her.

I'm so looking forward to seeing her grow in her career and more importantly what is next for her and her family. Thank you Kate!

Communications systems are crucial for our public safety organizations. Our first responders need reliable connections to be able to answer calls for help.

We have unfortunately experienced many instances where our public safety communications didn't work, and the consequences were devastating.

During the horrific terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11, 2001, our communications networks were overloaded, resulting in calls being dropped or not going through.

More recently, although significantly improved from 2001, in my home state of North Carolina we felt the severe impacts from the

Hurricane Helene devastation – ultimately preventing people from calling 9-1-1 and receiving life-saving care.

These are just two examples of major events where a lack of public safety communications cost hundreds and thousands of lives.

Today’s first responder communications landscape looks vastly different than that of 2001.

After 9/11, Congress stood up the 9/11 Commission, which released recommendations to prepare for and guard against future attacks.

One of those recommendations led to Congress establishing the First Responder Network Authority (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 territories. In 2017, AT&T was selected to deploy this network, and since then, other providers offer competitive services to serve public safety.

With FirstNet’s statutory authority set to expire in 2027, it’s time for Congress to assess the progress made by FirstNet to ensure the law

requirements are being met and it is adequately serving the needs of our public safety community.

Additionally, our 911 call centers are working to deploy advanced technology, known as “Next Generation 911”. Next Generation 911 is a critical technology upgrade for our first responders and I have been a long-time supporter of its deployment nationwide.

This internet protocol-based system at our 911 call centers will open the door for advanced tools for both the public and our first responders to use.

NG911-equipped centers are able to receive text messages, photos and videos to help aid response efforts. This technology also allows for seamless integration of artificial intelligence for cybersecurity purposes or to aid call takers in times of large call volumes or provide real time language transcription or even translation.

Once fully deployed, NG911 will be able to provide specific geolocation data for wireless callers, known as a dispatchable location. This accurate location will let first responders know the exact location of a caller automatically, instead of just the nearest cell tower.

Similar technologies are also being implemented to transmit vertical location data, which can help first responders locate the exact floor of someone in a high-rise building.

Equipping our first responders with this information can improve response times and help save lives. Importantly, this technology allows calls to be transferred or re-routed to other call centers, in the event a call center is taken offline due to an outage or natural disaster.

### **Conclusion**

Our public safety and law enforcement officers put their lives on the line every day to help us in our times of need, and we must make sure they have the best tools to do their jobs.

Today, we will hear from our witnesses about the state of public safety communications and whether public safety needs are being met. We will hear about what tools and technologies are most effective for them to do their job, and where improvements can be made.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses today about these issues and how Congress can stand ready as a partner.

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

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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.

Today's hearing is about one of the most critical resources: keeping America safe. Public safety communications are vital to ensure we have round-the-clock warnings to avoid tragedies, such as lives lost and the tens of thousands displaced during this year's California wildfire season or this summer's flash floods in central Texas, the deadliest in almost 49 years. These are not just one-off events. As climate change worsens, extreme weather events are becoming more common and deadly.

Yet, instead of investing in the public communication systems that literally save lives, Republicans are bending the knee as President Trump takes a wrecking ball to our public safety infrastructure. In July, congressional Republicans gave into President Trump's demands to cancel over a billion dollars in funding to local public television and radio stations, public media stations, which reach nearly 99 percent of Americans and can send out emergency alerts even when cellular and internet service are down.

In 2018, Sacramento's KVIE public TV delivered their first-ever earthquake early warning in under 3 seconds. This warning system by California public TV stations gives the public critical seconds of notice before shaking begins, allowing people to move to safety, hospitals to protect patients, and operators to secure critical infrastructure.

Yet Republicans chose to defund public media, kneecapping local and especially rural and remote communities' ability to receive life-saving information.

This isn't just speculation. We are already seeing the consequences play out in real time.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting can no longer administer grants for the next-generation warning system, leaving in limbo millions of dollars in funding to upgrade local stations' emergency alert equipment. And thanks to their One Big Ugly Bill, Republicans have hijacked billions of spectrum auction dollars to fund tax breaks for the wealthy, abandoning past bipartisan plans to use those funds for Next Generation 9-1-1 nationwide to update decade-old systems and provide faster, more accurate emergency responses.

At the same time, the Trump administration is gutting public safety agencies like the National Weather Service. DOGE fired close to 600 National Weather Service staff who were critical to delivering effective forecasting and disaster coordination. In May, the National Weather Service offices in Sacramento and Hanford had to close 24/7 operations because the Trump administration decimated over half their workers.

National Weather Service is not waste or fraud. It is an essential service to ensure Americans to be prepared for and survive natural disasters. Yet the Trump administration continues to dismantle what makes Americans safe.

Take FEMA, the lead agency for coordinating Federal disaster response. Before hurricane season, President Trump slashed FEMA's workforce and canceled billions in disaster preparedness funding. Across the board, where the Government is providing service that makes people safer, President Trump has decided it is not worth the cost.

Is that really the legacy my Republican colleagues want to leave behind? The best they have to offer their constituents? We should be investing more resources in our public safety infrastructure, not taking a chainsaw to them. We must restore public media funding, invest in Next Generation 9-1-1 nationwide, and fight back against President Trump's public safety cuts.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how we can strengthen public safety communications. And I do hope we can get back to working on this issue in a common, bipartisan way instead of standing by as this administration cripples our public safety and disaster preparedness.

[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**

*Subcommittee on Communications and Technology Hearing on “Public Safety  
Communications in the United States”*

**September 9, 2025**

Thank you, Chairman Hudson. Today’s hearing is about one of the most critical resources keeping Americans safe.

Public safety communications are vital to ensure we have around-the-clock warnings to avoid tragedies, such as the lives lost and the tens of thousands displaced during this year’s California wildfire season. Or this summer’s flash floods in Central Texas, the deadliest in nearly 49 years.

These are not just one-off events. As climate change worsens, extreme weather events are becoming more common and deadly. Hurricane season has grown longer and more intense, and wildfire season is now year-round in the Western U.S. Yet instead of investing in the public communications systems that literally save lives.

Republicans are bending the knee as President Trump takes a wrecking ball to our public safety infrastructure. In July, congressional Republicans gave in to President Trump’s demands to cancel over a billion dollars in funding to local public television and radio stations.

Public media stations which reach nearly 99 PERCENT of Americans and can send out emergency alerts even when cellular and internet service are down. In 2018, Sacramento’s K-V-I-E delivered the first-ever earthquake early warning in under three seconds.

This warning system by California public TV stations gives the public critical seconds of notice—before shaking begins—allowing people to move to safety, hospitals to protect patients, and operators to secure critical infrastructure. Yet Republicans chose to defund public media, kneecapping local communities’ ability to receive lifesaving information, especially in rural and remote areas.

This isn’t just speculation – we’re already seeing the results of these decisions play out in real time. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting can no longer administer grants for the Next Generation Warning System. That means millions of dollars in funding to upgrade local stations’ emergency alert equipment is left in limbo.

And thanks to their One Big Ugly Bill, Republicans have hijacked billions of spectrum auction dollars to fund tax breaks for the wealthy. Abandoning past bipartisan plans to use those funds to invest in Next Generation 9-1-1 nationwide, to update decades-old systems and provide faster, more accurate emergency responses.

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All while the Trump Administration is gutting public safety agencies like the National Weather Service. DOGE fired close to 600 N-W-S staff who were critical in delivering timely, accurate forecasting and effective disaster coordination.

In May, the N-W-S offices in Sacramento and Hanford had to close 24/7 operations because the Trump Administration decimated over half their workforce. N-W-S isn't waste or fraud. It's an essential service to ensure Americans have forecasts and alerts to not only plan their day, but to prepare for—and survive—natural disasters.

Yet, the Trump Administration continues to dismantle what keeps Americans safe. Take the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the lead agency for coordinating federal disaster response. Instead of bolstering FEMA before hurricane season, President Trump slashed its workforce and boasted about eliminating FEMA as soon as December.

Across the board, where the government is providing a service that makes people safer, President Trump has decided it's not worth the cost. Is that really the legacy my Republican colleagues want to leave behind? The best they have to offer their constituents?

We should be investing more resources in our public safety infrastructure, not taking a chainsaw to them. We must restore public media funding, invest in Next Generation 9-1-1 nationwide, and fight back against President Trump's public safety cuts.

We must also pass common sense solutions like my Emergency Reporting Act, to improve network resiliency and ensure first responders aren't left in the dark during life-threatening events. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how we can strengthen public safety communications.

I hope we can get back to working on this issue in a common sense, bipartisan way, instead of standing by as this Administration slashes and burns our public safety and disaster preparedness.

And with that, I yield the balance of my time...

Ms. MATSUI. And with that, I yield the balance of my time.

Mr. HUDSON. I thank the gentlelady.

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, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for bringing us together for this important hearing. Thanks to all of our witnesses for being here.

As you know, we are here in the wake of the tragic floods of Texas. And our hearts have been heavy for Representative Pfluger, who sits next to me, and Representative Carter, who had children and grandchildren at the camp who are, fortunately, OK. But they lost friends. And Representative Carter's grandchildren lost their cousin on the other side of his family. And it is just a heart-wrenching time, and our prayers are still out for these families. And it is just—but this tragedy highlights the importance of the hearing we have today and the communication infrastructure that we need in desperate moments like these.

We may take 9-1-1 for granted. As a matter of fact, if anybody has ever heard Robert Aderholt say this, in 1968 the first 9-1-1 call was placed in Haleyville, Alabama. I am not sure why Haleyville, Alabama, chose to be the first place to do it, but they did. And before that, you had to look up the police—the sheriff or the police officer or the hospital number in a phone book, those of us old enough to remember phone books. And now the single three-digit number improves the response times and saves lives.

So I think Robert was 2 or 3 years old. So think of how far the world has come in Robert Aderholt's lifetime. And it just—not that long ago. I mean, I know he is a little older than he wants to be, but it is not that long ago that we really had—that this was implemented.

So, since that first call, the technology has really changed, but it is changing exponentially now. Next Generation 9-1-1 is becoming more common at call centers around the country, which means faster and more prepared emergency responses, including enhanced location accuracy. I remember, when I first got here, we were talking about—this is the first time that somebody in a hotel room's mom—domestic abuse—and a child called—knew to call 9-1-1. And they were little but couldn't tell them which room they were in. So the police showed up to a hotel, but they didn't have any idea which room to go to. So I know that it gets even better with this type of—where we are with Next Generation.

So, regardless of what type of technology would service—providers, first responders use, it is critical that their communication tools work reliably in the moment of need. My home State of Kentucky has dealt with flooding and tornadoes in recent months, and my district dealt with the same just a few years ago, including my neighbors behind me. The tornado missed my house by about 100 yards. And so I have seen firsthand how access to reliable communications and having first responders that show up when you need it is extremely, extremely important, and it helps those in need.

But, before I wrap up, I had to take a second to thank Kate Harper—Kate O'Connor Harper—Harper as well. She has been an invaluable member of the team, always pleasant, always—and one of the smartest people you will deal with in this—maybe in all the spaces but certainly in telecommunications and has just been a pleasure to work with.

My daughter has moved to Chicago. So I always enjoy her Chicago accent. And the fact that she is going to work for a company—I don't know if we can say or not—but the company that has a hard O and a hard A in the title, it is fun to hear her say where she is going to work.

So anyway, thanks a lot. Godspeed. And you mean a lot to this committee, and I look forward to working with you in your new endeavor.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Guthrie follows:]

**Opening Statement of Chairman Brett Guthrie  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
“Public Safety Communications in the United States”  
Tuesday, September 9, 2025, 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 about the state of public safety communications and learning what our first responders need going forward.

In the wake of the tragic floods in Texas in July, we are especially thankful for our emergency responders, and we are committed to making sure they can do their jobs effectively. I know Representatives Pfluger and Carter respectively had children and grandchildren attending the camp, and fortunately they are okay. We will continue to pray for those whom we have lost and their families in this heart-wrenching time. A tragedy like this highlights the importance of the hearing topic today, as communications infrastructure is needed in desperate moments like these.

We may take “9-1-1” for granted today, but the very first 911 call was placed in 1968 in Haleyville, Alabama. Before then, reporting an emergency meant looking up the local

agency's number manually. The single, three-digit number improves response times and saves lives when every second counts.

Since that first 911 call, technology for public safety communications has advanced significantly. Next Generation 911 is becoming more common at call centers around the country, which means faster and more prepared emergency responses, including enhanced location accuracy. Nationwide networks that provide more seamless, cutting-edge service and advanced deployable communications infrastructure provides quick restoration of service for first responders after a natural disaster. And low earth orbit satellites are providing service in areas that traditional mobile service can't reach, leading to more resilient networks.

Regardless of what type of technology or which service provider first responders use, it is critical that their communications tools work reliably in the moment of need. My home state of Kentucky has also dealt with significant flooding and tornadoes in recent months, and my district dealt with the same just a few years ago. I have seen firsthand how reliable access to communications infrastructure is critical for our first

responders and our communities during emergencies, and I am excited to learn about how this Committee can help our nation's first responders to strengthen our public safety communications across the country to better serve those in need.

Before I wrap up, I want to take a moment to thank and congratulate my Communications and Technology Chief Counsel Kate Harper for her service to this Committee. Kate served under three Chairs of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and has been an invaluable team member for as long as she's been here. Though we will certainly miss her, we are very excited for her, as she takes on a new challenge in the private sector.

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

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

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

Mr. HUDSON. I thank the gentleman.

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, Mr. Chairman.

At a time when our Nation is facing more and more devastating extreme weather events, from wildfires to hurricanes to flooding, it is critical that Congress do more to keep first responders connected and our communities informed. The Energy and Commerce Committee has a long history of supporting emergency communications systems and the first responders who rely on them day in and day out to keep our communications safe.

Unfortunately, the Republican majority has jammed through bills that abandon first responders and the safety of our communities. The Republicans' Big Ugly Bill reinstated the Federal Communications Commission spectrum auction authority without any plan to ensure that auction proceeds will fund priorities that serve the public interest. In fact, my Republican colleagues abandoned a bipartisan agreement that was unanimously passed out of the full committee last Congress to fully fund the deployment of Next Generation 9-1-1 across the country using those revenues raised from spectrum auctions.

Many of America's emergency communications centers rely on outdated infrastructure and technologies from half a century ago. This makes them less effective in dispatching timely emergency response and leaves them dangerously vulnerable to cyber attacks. It is long past time to address this problem. The Senate devoting just a fraction of the Big Ugly Bill's nearly 90 billion in spectrum auction revenues to modernize our public safety communication systems, Republicans made a conscious choice that tax breaks for billionaires and big corporations are a more deserving cause, and I completely disagree.

Next Generation 9-1-1 is a critical public safety initiative that will save countless lives. NG 9-1-1 will allow Americans to call and send texts, images, or videos to 9-1-1 to help first responders and emergency personnel better assess emergencies and assist people in need. It will reduce response times and equip first responders with lifesaving information before they arrive at the scene. And these funds would save lives, but Republicans walked away from the agreement to invest in this program with their Big Ugly Bill. And I think it is a betrayal of our Nation's first responders and 9-1-1 dispatchers.

In another blow to public safety, congressional Republicans and President Trump stripped away billions of dollars in promised funding to public broadcasters who play a vital role keeping communities informed during times of emergency. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting will now close its doors by the end of this month, and the public stations it served are already staring down the negative consequences of Republicans' actions. Look no further than the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Next Genera-

tion Warning System Grant Program, which was administered by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. It provided funding to public media to keep communities informed during disasters, like during the recent floods in Texas and during hurricanes last year in Florida and western North Carolina. Since the funding rescission, the program's future is in serious jeopardy, threatening public stations' access to funding to upgrade and maintain emergency alert systems.

And this committee's work to improve public safety communications' capabilities has traditionally been a bipartisan endeavor, and it should be. But it is impossible to ignore the near constant damage our Republican colleagues inflict on institutions that serve the public interest. It is our job to ensure first responders have the tools they need to communicate and that broadcasters are equipped to keep the public informed. And these senseless cuts make their jobs harder, not easier.

So I hope we can reverse course and get back to work in a bipartisan way to pass real solutions to make our public safety communications systems faster, more reliable, and more secure for the benefit of all Americans.

We should be working together to pass and fully fund the Next Generation 9-1-1 program. But we also have to come together to address the looming sunset of the First Responder Network Authority, or FirstNet, to ensure that first responders do not lose access to this vital communications network and the capabilities that it provides. Public safety organizations representing law enforcement, fire, emergency medical services, and local authorities have called on Congress to pass legislation to preserve FirstNet's authority to operate beyond the sunset date. And it is critical that we act on that as well.

So, again, Mr. Chairman, I look forward to the discussion. I yield back the balance of my time. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Pallone follows:]

**Committee on Energy and Commerce****Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery  
of  
Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.*****Subcommittee on Communications and Technology Hearing on “Public Safety  
Communications in the United States”*****September 9, 2025**

At a time when our nation is facing more and more devastating extreme weather events—from wildfires to hurricanes to flooding—it is critical that Congress do more to keep first responders connected and our communities informed.

The Energy and Commerce Committee has a long history of supporting emergency communications systems and the first responders who rely on them day in and day out to keep our communities safe. Unfortunately, the Republican majority has jammed through bills that abandon first responders and the safety of our communities.

The Republicans’ Big Ugly Bill reinstated the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) spectrum auction authority without any plan to ensure that auction proceeds will fund priorities that serve the public interest. In fact, my Republican colleagues abandoned a bipartisan agreement that was unanimously passed out of the full Committee last Congress to fully fund the deployment of Next Generation 9-1-1 across the country using those revenues raised from spectrum auctions.

Many of America’s emergency communications centers rely on outdated infrastructure and technologies from half a century ago. This makes them less effective in dispatching timely emergency response and leaves them dangerously vulnerable to cyberattacks. It is long past time to address this problem. But instead of devoting just a fraction of the Big Ugly Bill’s nearly \$90 billion in spectrum auction revenues to modernize our public safety communications systems, Republicans made a conscious choice that tax breaks for billionaires and big corporations are a more deserving cause. I completely disagree.

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In another blow to public safety, Congressional Republicans and President Trump stripped away billions of dollars in promised funding to public broadcasters who play a vital role keeping communities informed during times of emergency. The Corporation for Public

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Broadcasting will now close its doors by the end of this month, and the public stations it served are already staring down the negative consequences of Republicans' actions. Look no further than the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Next Generation Warning System grant program, which was administered by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. It provided funding to public media to keep communities informed during disasters – like during the recent floods in Texas and during Hurricane Helene last year in Florida and Western North Carolina. Since the funding rescission, the program's future is in serious jeopardy – threatening public stations' access to funding to upgrade and maintain emergency alert systems.

This Committee's work to improve public safety communications capabilities has traditionally been a bipartisan endeavor, and it should be. But it is impossible to ignore the near constant damage our Republican colleagues inflict on institutions that serve the public interest. It is our job to ensure first responders have the tools they need to communicate and that broadcasters are equipped to keep the public informed. These senseless cuts make their jobs harder, not easier.

I hope we can reverse course and get back to work in a bipartisan way to pass real solutions to make our public safety communications systems faster, more reliable, and more secure for the benefit of all Americans. We should be working together to pass and fully fund the Next Generation 9-1-1 program.

We must also come together to address the looming sunset of the First Responder Network Authority, or FirstNet, to ensure that first responders do not lose access to this vital communications network and the capabilities it provides. Public safety organizations representing law enforcement, fire, emergency medical services, and local authorities have called on Congress to pass legislation to preserve FirstNet's authority to operate beyond the sunset date. It is critical that we act.

I look forward to the discussion and yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. HUDSON. I thank the gentleman.

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

The witnesses here before us today are Mr. Steve Newton, Emergency Management Director from Chatham County, North Carolina Emergency Management; Sheriff Shannon Dicus from San Bernardino County—tells me that is the largest county in America—thank you, Sheriff; Dr. Brian Fontes, former chief executive officer from the National Emergency Number Association; and Mr. Randall C. Wright, executive director of Florida Public Radio Emergency Network and Project BEACON. Thank you all again.

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

**STATEMENTS OF STEVEN K. NEWTON, EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIRECTOR, CHATHAM COUNTY, NC; SHANNON DICUS, SHERIFF, SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY; BRIAN FONTES, PH.D., FORMER CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, NATIONAL EMERGENCY NUMBER ASSOCIATION; AND RANDALL C. WRIGHT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, DIVISION OF MEDIA PROPERTIES, COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND COMMUNICATIONS, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA**

**STATEMENT OF STEVEN K. NEWTON**

Mr. NEWTON. Thank you, Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, and distinguished members of the subcommittee.

My name is Steve Newton. I am the Emergency Management Director of Chatham County, North Carolina. I also serve as the vice chair of the Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee. I welcome the opportunity to discuss public safety communications as they exist today in the United States.

The ability for public safety leaders and responders to communicate is never more essential than the days immediately before and immediately following a disaster. We depend on communications pathways from government to government, government to the public, and public to the public. When any of these pathways fails, there are dire consequences.

In many cases, the ability to communicate may help us prevent a disaster from becoming a catastrophe. Widespread and sustained inoperable cellular networks, land mobile radio systems, and 9-1-1 call routing create an exceptionally difficult operating environment in which incident commanders and responders aren't aware of changing conditions, can't adequately plan and request resources, can't effectively direct response activities, alert the public, or protect frontline personnel.

Over the last 32 years, I have participated in the response to 21 federally declared disasters across North Carolina, Louisiana, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and South Carolina. Most recently, I responded to Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina and di-

rected the response to Tropical Storm Chantal in my own jurisdiction. Of those disasters, three stand out for their impact to public safety communications.

First was in 2005 at St. Tammany Parrish in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina. And the common theme that you will hear: wind, torrential rain, and flooding. In this case, storm surge resulted in loss of life, damage to homes, damage to 9-1-1 centers. And I will fluctuate between calling it a 9-1-1 center, a comm center, a PSAP, or a public safety answering point. Please forgive me. Our emergency response facilities were affected, public works yards, communications tower, wired and wireless internet, and telephony.

In Louisiana, two 9-1-1 centers were offline for more than 30 days. For the first week after impact, we had no call routing. So 9-1-1 calls were either abandoned or were not consistently routed. Some were answered. Some just did not go through.

Even after 10 days, some manual call routing could occur, and they went to 10-digit lines. And what you get with a 10-digit standard telephone line is you get a voice but you don't get any of the additional data, locations, anything like that.

In 2017, I responded to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. The day after landfall, on September 20th, 95 percent of their cell phones were out of service. And that is a combination—and again, you will hear common themes today. It was a combination of damage to fiber optic backhaul and transport lines, and then certainly into the days and weeks and months that followed, it was interruption of the power supply.

Due to limited communications, our team—we broke up into several teams. I was given the area around San Juan and six municipalities, or counties, in Puerto Rico. We spent 3 days going from municipality to municipality to try to locate local leaders to just understand what they were facing, understand what the dire needs were that we could work on today.

And these needs—and I—3 weeks out, these needs included oxygen, water, food. And, again, we had to drive around with a piece of paper and try to find these folks.

Ultimately, it would take 11 months to restore 100 percent of the power on the island, the longest power outage in U.S. history that I am aware of.

In 2024, I responded to western North Carolina after Hurricane Helene. Again, wind, torrential rain, flooding. In this case, landslides did the same damage—damaged infrastructure, damaged homes, loss of life. Over 1,700 miles of fiber optic cable were destroyed. Nineteen PSAPs were taken offline where they could not receive a 9-1-1 call directly.

In our case, 74 percent of cell sites were out of service across the region—again, the result—a result of fiberoptic transport lines being cut, the result of power outages and inaccessibility.

Hurricane Helene represented some of the most complex communications challenges I have ever faced as a professional.

I will leave you with the successes for us. The North Carolina 9-1-1's Board's statewide Emergency Services IP Network, the ESInet, meant that of those 19 PSAPs, their calls were routed to

a backup PSAP. So, if a call made it to the system, it was answered.

Our State Highway Patrol's VIPER land mobile radio system processed 3 million calls.

And then, finally, our partnership that coordinated repairs, deployables, and broadband internet to bring us back online.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Newton follows:]

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**Testimony of  
Steven K. Newton  
Emergency Management Director  
Chatham County, NC**

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

**Public Safety Communications in the United States**

**Tuesday, September 9, 2025  
Washington, D.C.**

Testimony of Steven K. Newton before the U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Communications & Technology  
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SUMMARY

As set forth in the following testimony, I support:

- Establishing Recovery Time Objectives for full FirstNet cell sites, not just delivery and activation of deployable cell sites.
- Requiring additional hardening and resilience measures to be implemented at cell sites supporting the FirstNet National Public Safety Broadband Network, including redundant transport pathways (satellite, microwave, disparate fiber paths, etc.) and increased run time requirements for backup power systems.
- Passage of the AM for Every Vehicle Act of 2025 (H.R. 979 / S. 315) to require access to AM broadcast stations in all new motor vehicles.

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Subcommittee on Communications & Technology  
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Thank you Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, and distinguished members of the Sub-Committee. My name is Steve Newton, I am the Emergency Management Director for Chatham County, North Carolina. I also serve as the Vice Chair of the North Carolina Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee. I welcome the opportunity to discuss public safety communications.

The ability for public safety leaders and responders to communicate is never more essential than the days immediately before and after a disaster. We depend on communications pathways from Government-to-Government, Government-to-Public, and Public-to-Public. When any of these pathways fail, there are consequences. In many cases, the ability to communicate may help us prevent a disaster from becoming a catastrophe. Widespread and sustained inoperability of cellular networks, land mobile radio systems, and 911 call routing create an exceptionally difficult operating environment in which incident commanders and responders aren't aware of changing conditions, can't adequately plan and request resources, can't effectively direct response activities, alert the public, or protect its front-line personnel.

Over the last 32 years, I have participated in the response to twenty-one federally declared disasters, in North Carolina, Louisiana, South Carolina, Puerto Rico, and Hawaii. Most recently I responded to Hurricane Helene in western North Carolina, and directed the response to Hurricane Chantal in my own jurisdiction. Of those disasters, three stand out for their impact to public safety communications.

In 2005 I deployed to Saint Tammany Parish, Louisiana, after Hurricane Katrina. Wind, torrential rain, flooding, and storm surge resulted in loss of life, damage to homes, damage to public safety answering points (9-1-1 Centers), emergency response facilities (police/fire/EMS stations/hospitals), public works yards, communications towers, wired and cellular telephone

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facilities, power distribution, and other infrastructure. A telephone tandem located in New Orleans flooded, resulting in many 911 calls failing to be connected for more than a week in the region. After the second week calls were routed to PSAPs and temporary call centers over 10-digit administrative numbers, but without location information. Two 911 Centers in Louisiana were offline for more than 30 days. Requests for life saving resources had to be driven 68 miles away to the Louisiana State Emergency Operations Center (EOC) in Baton Rouge.

In 2017 I responded to the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico after Hurricane María. The day after landfall on September 20, 95.2% of their cell sites were out of service. Three weeks after landfall, 81.1% of cell sites were still inoperable. Due to limited communications, our team spent three entire days on the road trying to locate community leaders who could brief us on current conditions and immediate needs. After we identified the needs, it took 9 days for our first resource request to arrive. It took 11 months to restore 100% power across the island, the longest blackout in United States history.

In 2024 I responded to western North Carolina after Hurricane Helene. Wind, torrential rain, landslides, and flooding resulted in loss of life, damage to homes, and damaged emergency response facilities, power distribution, utility and infrastructure. Over 1,700 miles of fiber optic cable was destroyed. Nineteen PSAPs were offline. 74% of cell sites were out of service across the region. Most of these cellular outages were a result of damage to fiber optic transport lines or extended power outages. This was across all cellular carriers, including FirstNet.

Hurricane Helene represents the most complex communications challenge encountered by public safety in North Carolina. Some of our successes include:

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- North Carolina 911 Boards statewide Emergency Services IP network (ESInet). This allowed calls to the 19 offline PSAPs to be rerouted to non-impacted PSAPs. Chatham County received 9-1-1 calls for one impacted county for 30-days.
- North Carolina State Highway Patrol's Voice Interoperability Plan for Emergency Responders (VIPER) land mobile radio network processed nearly 3,000,000 radio calls.
- Private sector partners that coordinated repairs, deployable cell towers ("deployables"), and broadband internet.
- The cadre of communications professionals mobilized from across the State to restore essential equipment and links at PSAP's, EOC's, Shelters, and other emergency facilities.

Some of our challenges include:

- Widespread cell service interruption, across all carriers, occurring simultaneously due to landslides, flooding, or trees damaging primary fiber lines shared by multiple carriers.
- After 7 days, 22.2% of cell sites were offline overall, down from 74%. But within the harder hit jurisdictions like Yancey and Mitchell Counties, they still had 77% and 90% of their cell sites down, respectively. To my knowledge, these sites are not equipped with an alternative data transport circuits (i.e., satellite, microwave, disparate fiber paths, etc.).
- The use of temporary deployables to reestablish cell service to PSAPs, EOCs, hospitals, and other critical facilities was crucial. But it did not provide enough wide area coverage into the communities in where our responders were working.
- Communications tower sites, many of which are challenging to reach under normal conditions, became inaccessible after Helene. Refueling generators at communications tower sites becomes an immediate concern, especially when it's clear that utility power won't be restored for days or weeks.

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The Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN), FirstNet, must be highly reliable, resilient, and secure, especially during a disaster. To that end, I recommend:

- Requiring additional hardening and resilience measures to be implemented at cell sites integrated into the FirstNet NPSBN, including redundant transport pathways (satellite, microwave, disparate fiber paths, etc.) and increased run time requirements for backup power systems.
- Establishing Recovery Time Objectives for FirstNet cell sites, in part or in full per county, and not just delivery and activation of deployables.

Thank you again Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the Sub-Committee for allowing me to share my experiences and perspectives with you, and thank you all for your work to secure and advance public safety communications.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.  
 Sheriff, you have 5 minutes for your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF SHERIFF SHANNON DICUS**

Sheriff DICUS. Chairman Hudson and Ranking Member Matsui and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and thank you for all of your continued leadership on advancing Next Gen 9-1-1.

My name is Shannon Dicus, and I serve as the sheriff of San Bernardino County, California. I am testifying on behalf of Major County Sheriffs of America, an association representing sheriffs' offices that collectively serve more than 110 million people in urban, suburban, and rural communities. Sheriffs' offices cover entire counties, which means we oversee both city and unincorporated areas, critical infrastructure, and remote rural regions. We respond to a wide range of emergencies to coordinate daily with Federal agencies, State, and local partners, fire service, and emergency medical service.

We also operate some of the Nation's largest 9-1-1 centers. Many smaller agencies in our regions rely on us for communication support, so when systems are disrupted, the impact is broad. For this region—for this reason, emergency communications remain one of our highest priorities.

We have seen why this work matters. When central Texas was hit with severe flooding this summer, many residents reported late or missing warnings. Those delays cost precious time. That is why modern, interoperable systems like Next Generation 9-1-1 are essential. They ensure alerts reach people quickly across multiple technical platforms and give responders better situational awareness.

We also know firsthand how cyber incidents can disrupt emergency response. In 2023, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department experienced a ransomware attack that took our computer-aided dispatch offline and forced deputies to rely on handheld radios and manual processes. While we restored operations, the event underscored how vulnerable local systems can be and why consistent Federal cybersecurity standards and resources are so important.

So today I respectfully ask that Congress take four key steps.

The first: Pass legislation to upgrade America to true Next Gen 9-1-1 capabilities with an emphasis on cybersecurity, resiliency, and real-time data.

Number two: Fund these essential upgrades to ensure consistent service in both urban and rural areas.

Number three: Remove the sunset provision on the FirstNet authority, allowing continued reinvestment of program revenues into network improvements without taxpayer dollars.

And number four: Establish Federal cybersecurity standards to help public safety agencies protect against growing digital threats.

In San Bernardino County, which spans 20,000 square miles and serves more than 2 million residents, we have worked to modernize our systems. We are among the first in California to deploy texts to 9-1-1 and have since expanded to full Next Generation 9-1-1 with geodiverse call routing and improved interoperability. These

improvements have strengthened our response through connectivity gaps. However, vulnerabilities still remain.

FirstNet has also been a valuable addition. California's decision to opt in brought five new FirstNet towers to our county. The FirstNet authority has committed 2 billion nationwide to reinvest and fund in the program itself rather than funding by taxpayers. To maintain that progress, Congress must extend FirstNet's authorization beyond 2027.

Finally, I want to highlight the importance of our public safety communicators, the professionals who answer our 9-1-1 calls. Reclassifying them under the 9-1-1 SAVES Act will ensure they receive the training and support and resources that they need.

Mr. Chairman and Members, our request is straightforward: Continue building on systems that are working, strengthen cybersecurity protections, and provide the resources necessary to ensure that every community has access to modern, reliable emergency communications.

Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to all of your questions.

[The prepared statement of Sheriff Dicus follows:]



SHANNON D. DICUS, SHERIFF CORONER



TESTIMONY OF  
SHERIFF SHANNON DICUS  
SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
SEPTEMBER 9, 2025

Chairman Hudson, Vice Chairman Allen, Ranking Member Matsui, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for holding this critical hearing, and thank you, Chairman Hudson, for your continued leadership on efforts to ensure Next Generation 9-1-1 capabilities reach every community.

I am Sheriff Shannon Dicus of San Bernardino County, California, testifying today on behalf of the Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA) – a professional law enforcement association representing sheriffs' offices serving counties with populations of 400,000 or more and employing 700 or more personnel. Collectively, our member agencies protect over 110 million Americans – more than one-third of the U.S. population – across both densely populated urban centers and vast rural territories.

Sheriffs' offices cover entire counties, often including multiple cities, rural communities, and critical infrastructure. We respond to some of the nation's most complex and resource-intensive emergencies – from major event security and multi-jurisdictional investigations to disaster response across hundreds of square miles. We work closely with federal agencies, state police, local departments, fire services, and emergency management partners across jurisdictional boundaries.

We operate some of the largest 911 centers in the country, coordinate multi-agency responses, and maintain the communications infrastructure that many smaller agencies depend on during critical incidents. Federal partners rely on our local expertise and coordination capabilities. Multi-state investigations depend on our communications systems. When those systems fail, entire regions are impacted.

That's why MCSA has made emergency communications a top legislative priority. We have unmatched insight into where systems work – and where they fail. We know what's needed to keep Americans safe. We know that a robust and secure ecosystem of cellular networks, land mobile radio networks, and satellite networks is necessary to ensure our public safety personnel can give and receive critical life-saving information on every square foot of the territory we help to protect.

Today, I ask you to take actions to save American lives: Pass legislation to upgrade America to true Next Generation 9-1-1 capabilities and modernize emergency response networks with a focus on cybersecurity, resiliency, and real-time data capabilities; fund these essential upgrades; pass legislation to remove the sunset provision on the FirstNet Authority which has guided the deployment of the dedicated nationwide public safety broadband network that gives first responders priority communications; and establish federal cybersecurity standards for emergency systems. These investments will transform emergency response nationwide.

#### **Next Generation 911**

Citizens are already attempting to send text, video, and images to 911 during emergencies. Next Generation 9-1-1 ensures those inputs are not lost but transformed into actionable intelligence. With FirstNet integration, this intelligence is pushed directly to deputies, firefighters, and medics in route – turning raw data into real-time outcomes. This is how lives are saved in school shootings, floods, and wildfires

During school shootings, first responders often arrive blind to the threat because witnesses can't share visual information. In wildfire evacuations, agencies operate with outdated data because they cannot exchange live mapping. Emergency medical calls lack patient histories, real-time video, or exact location data – missing tools that could mean the difference between life and death.

These challenges are especially apparent in large and diverse jurisdictions that must cover vast territories with varied terrain and infrastructure limitations. As Sheriff of San Bernardino County – an area spanning 20,000 square miles and serving more than 2 million residents – I have witnessed firsthand how these communication gaps impact emergency response. Our operations range from dense urban environments to remote wilderness rescues separated by over 100 miles. We coordinate daily across municipal boundaries, state lines, and federal jurisdictions in deserts with limited cellular service, mountains where radio systems often fail, and congested urban areas where critical transmissions can be blocked.

Recognizing the growing demands on emergency communications, San Bernardino County took early and proactive steps to modernize our infrastructure. We were one of the first departments in California to implement text-to-911 capabilities, giving us firsthand insight into both the

potential and the complexities of Next Generation 9-1-1 deployment. Building on that foundation, we have implemented Next Generation 9-1-1 across our primary Public Safety Answering Points, integrating geo-diverse call routing, redundant systems, and enhanced interoperability. These upgrades have significantly improved coordination, resiliency, and our ability to respond to crises in real time.

However, even with a sophisticated system in place, challenges remain. Many smaller agencies in our region rely on our infrastructure to maintain basic emergency communications. Federal partners often depend on our coordination capabilities during large-scale incidents. When these systems go down, the impact is not isolated – it disrupts entire regions and puts lives at risk.

A key barrier to accelerating Next Generation 9-1-1 buildout is the current bureaucratic structure through which federal funds are distributed. Funds for Next Generation 9-1-1 are often routed through state agencies and Offices of Emergency Services, which, while well-intentioned, may not always reflect the local urgency or infrastructure readiness of counties like ours. We strongly urge Congress to explore flexible and direct-to-county funding options or streamlined administrative pathways to ensure local agencies can act swiftly to address the specific needs of their communities.

#### **Redundancy and Interoperability**

Next Generation 9-1-1 is not simply a technological upgrade; it is a life-saving necessity. The ability to transmit real-time video, images, and accurate location data during an emergency can make the difference between life and death. Yet despite its proven value and the availability of workable technology, Next Generation 9-1-1 deployment across the United States remains fragmented and underfunded. Many counties – particularly in rural or under-resourced areas – continue to rely on legacy systems built decades ago, which cannot meet the demands of today's emergencies.

In San Bernardino County, we maintain dual-carrier interoperability in our patrol vehicles, enabling deputies to use both AT&T and Verizon networks. Our Mobile Data Computers (MDCs) automatically switch between carriers based on signal strength. This redundancy ensures our deputies can access mission-critical data, no matter the geography or carrier limitations.

Traditional 800MHz land mobile radios also remain a core component of our communication ecosystem. In several areas of Southern California, including parts of our own jurisdiction, peace officers have no access to broadband data—only radio coverage. We maintain robust radio infrastructure and dispatch center interoperability boxes, which allow agencies like Caltrans, CHP, local fire, and law enforcement to seamlessly communicate during joint responses. Next Generation 9-1-1 must be additive to – not a replacement for – these essential tools.

#### **FirstNet and Infrastructure Security**

As a result of California's opt-in to FirstNet, San Bernardino County received five new FirstNet tower sites in areas where coverage was most urgently needed. Since then, Band 14 spectrum has been expanded into Apple Valley, Big Bear City, Chino Hills, Fontana, Highland, Montclair, San Bernardino, and Victorville. This reinvestment is not taxpayer-funded but comes from the FirstNet Authority's self-sustaining model, which is directing \$2 billion back into coverage expansion nationwide. These tangible results highlight both the promise of FirstNet and the importance of strong federal oversight to ensure public safety continues to receive prioritized service.

We also face an alarming rise in physical threats to communications infrastructure. In San Bernardino County, we've responded to cases of vandalism, sabotage, and even targeted acts of terrorism against towers and network nodes. These attacks jeopardize emergency response capabilities across rural, urban, and suburban settings. Ensuring the resilience of these systems requires both digital and physical security measures.

Further, our geography presents unique challenges. The San Andreas Fault bisects San Bernardino County. A significant earthquake could disrupt microwave systems—rendering critical network links inoperable due to physical misalignment. Unlike microwave, cellular towers offer greater survivability post-disaster and more rapid restoration timelines. To increase redundancy in our rural areas, we've also deployed Starlink satellite systems with outstanding results. In fact, I rely on Starlink personally at my own rural home, where traditional broadband service is unavailable.

#### **Cybersecurity**

FirstNet was designed with a dedicated core, a security operations center, and mission-critical standards informed directly by public safety input. That means the same protections against

cyberattack or network congestion apply equally to law enforcement, fire, and EMS. Resilient backhaul, surge capacity, and deployable assets must remain at the forefront of federal reinvestment priorities.

In San Bernardino County, we have firsthand experience with this challenge. A malicious email compromised critical systems – causing deputies to conduct traffic stops without access to license plate information, dispatchers to lose access to criminal histories, and our computer-aided dispatch system to go offline. Although we restored the system, the disruption posed significant risks and highlighted vulnerabilities in our infrastructure.

This was not an isolated incident. Across the country, cyberattacks have disrupted Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems, and radio towers – crippling emergency response capabilities. In our own county, we have experienced not only cyberattacks but also repeated acts of physical vandalism targeting critical communication towers, as well as incidents of terrorism directed at cellular infrastructure. Our emergency systems cannot afford to remain this vulnerable.

What’s needed now is strong, consistent federal leadership to establish and enforce nationwide cybersecurity standards – ensuring that emergency systems remain resilient, secure, and fully operational when lives are on the line.

**Elevating the Role of Public Safety Telecommunicators**

Congress must pass the 911 SAVES Act to reclassify public safety telecommunicators from “administrative and clerical” roles to protective service occupations.

This change acknowledges that telecommunicators are the critical first responders – guiding callers through lifesaving first aid, providing negotiation support during hostage situations, and gathering vital information in active shooter incidents. Reclassification will also grant access to enhanced training funding and expanded mental health resources.

As MCSA agencies employing thousands of these dedicated professionals, we recognize and deeply value their indispensable role in safeguarding the public and supporting our deputies’ safety.

To protect American lives, Congress must act decisively to modernize our emergency response systems. This means:

- Passing legislation to implement true Next Generation 9-1-1 capabilities,
- Securing sustained, flexible funding for essential upgrades,
- Extending FirstNet's authorization and enforcing public safety prioritization standards,
- Establishing strong federal cybersecurity protections,
- Promoting interoperability and redundancy across carriers, platforms, and frequencies,
- Supporting direct-to-county administrative pathways for infrastructure funding, and
- Elevating the classification of 911 telecommunicators.

### **Conclusion**

My agency – and every public safety agency – relies on resilient, modern communications systems to safeguard our communities. From delivering life-saving alerts, to responding to 9-1-1 calls, to coordinating with our fire, EMS, and federal partners, these systems are the backbone of public safety. FirstNet is not an experiment; it is an integral part of our operations today. But unless we act, the FirstNet Authority will expire in 2027, and our progress toward true Next Generation 9-1-1 will stall.

On behalf of the Major County Sheriffs of America and the millions of citizens we serve, I respectfully urge Congress to:

- Pass legislation to upgrade America to true Next Generation 9-1-1 capabilities and modernize emergency response networks with a focus on cybersecurity, resiliency, and real-time data.
- Fund these essential upgrades to ensure every community – large or small, urban or rural – has access to the same life-saving technology.
- Remove the sunset provision on the FirstNet Authority, allowing this proven governance model to continue expanding coverage and reinvesting billions back into the network without taxpayer dollars.
- Establish federal cybersecurity standards for emergency systems, so that critical networks remain hardened against both malicious attacks and natural disasters.

Let me be clear: public safety does not need more fractured or duplicative systems. We must build on the proven success of our Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network and the advances of Next Generation 9-1-1. In doing so, we will continue the momentum toward true

interoperability, real-time intelligence, and unified command—delivering the communications capabilities that every American deserves when lives are on the line.

The path forward is clear, the need is urgent, and the benefits are undeniable. Now is the time for Congress to act.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you, Sheriff.

Dr. Fontes, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF BRIAN FONTES, Ph.D.**

Dr. FONTES. Thank you very much, Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, and members of the subcommittee. I am honored to be here today.

My goal is really rather simple. I have two of them. The first is to ask Congress to enact legislation to reclassify the dedicated 9-1-1 professionals as true public safety professionals and to fully fund the deployment of Next Generation 9-1-1. I echo the comments of my colleagues.

Currently, 9-1-1 professionals are classified as administrative or secretarial, similar to receptionists and secretaries, rather than protective service. And it is with this protective service that includes police and fire. It should also include 9-1-1 professionals. This misclassification is a relic of legacy 9-1-1 last century, Haleyville, Alabama, when I was a senior in high school, when the first public 9-1-1 call was made.

Today, 9-1-1 professionals do so much more. They handle medical triage, provide crucial situational awareness for our emergency response teams, and they undergo rigorous training in the various medical protocols, technologies, and procedures that must be followed.

Representative Torres, a former 9-1-1 professional, and Representative Fitzpatrick, along with Senators Blackburn and Klobuchar, have long championed the 9-1-1 SAVES Act. This zero-cost bill would reclassify 9-1-1 telecommunicators—or professionals, as I call them—for what they are: true public safety professionals. They are key components to the emergency response team. As such, they deserve to be recognized alongside their public safety colleagues.

The next issue: Funding is urgently needed for Next Generation 9-1-1. 9-1-1 is often the first point of contact between citizens and emergency first responders or field responders. Yet many of our Nation's 9-1-1 systems are rooted in last-century voice-centric technology. Nearly 90 percent of the 9-1-1 calls today originate from smartphone devices, broadband-capable devices. But legacy 9-1-1 systems are not designed to receive data or to process data, videos, texts, or other important information relevant to that specific emergency.

The answer is simple. Next Generation 9-1-1 is a suite of standards-based technologies that will fully modernize the 9-1-1 systems with information-rich data, enhanced cybersecurity, redundancy, and resiliency. We have heard this already. And this will inevitably protect the public in a more efficient manner. It allows 9-1-1 centers to push and pull data between and among senders themselves.

But NG 9-1-1 only works if 9-1-1 centers across the Nation can acquire necessary technologies. Transition costs—moving from legacy 9-1-1 systems to Next Generation 9-1-1 systems adds financial strain to local communities, Tribal lands, and States. The soon-

er NG 9–1–1 can be deployed, the sooner these expensive-to-maintain, last-century legacy systems can be phased out.

We saw the potential of NG 9–1–1 in North Carolina with Hurricane Helene. Centers using emergency service IP networks, or ESI nets or SE nets, a key component in the building blocks for Next Generation 9–1–1, enable a variety of things to occur such as geofencing affected areas and routing calls to other centers that were not affected by the hurricane. But ESI nets alone are not enough. Until the entire country is fully deployed in Next Generation 9–1–1, no State, regardless of its investment, will fully realize the maximum benefits of Next Generation 9–1–1.

In 2012, Congress authorized a study to determine the cost to fully transition to Next Generation 9–1–1. That study was completed in 2018. And, adjusted for today’s dollars, the value of that estimated—and there was a range between roughly 9 and 13 billion dollars—but that, if you were adjusting it for today’s dollars, you would be closer to \$15 billion.

Waiting for another cost study or analysis to be completed is not necessarily the answer. And, in fact, it could turn out to be a delay, such as the 6-year study before. The answer is to fund Next Generation 9–1–1.

I want to thank Chairman Hudson, Vice Chairman Allen, Ranking Members Pallone and Matsui for their bipartisan support of Next Generation 9–1–1 funding during the markup of the reconciliation bill and previous statements.

I urge Congress to establish consistent funding stream that can be accessed easily and efficiently by State and local governments for the deployment of Next Generation 9–1–1.

In January of 2024, nine former FCC Chairs, both Republicans and Democratic administrations, sent a letter to Congress underscoring the need to fully fund Next Generation 9–1–1. I believe that was the first time in the history of the FCC that nine former Chairmen agreed to the common issue of funding—in this case, Next Generation 9–1–1.

Unfortunately, everybody in this room will likely end up calling 9–1–1 at some point in their life. I would hope that we would provide them, your constituents, all of us, the best 9–1–1 service in America.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Fontes follows:]

**Written Testimony of  
Brian Fontes  
Former CEO of the NENA – The 9-1-1 Association  
Hearing on  
“Public Safety Communications in the United States”  
before the U.S. House Committee on Energy & Commerce  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
Tuesday, September 9, 2025 | Washington, DC**

Thank you, Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, and members of the subcommittee. I am honored to be here to testify.

I have spent most of my 40-plus-year career in wireless communications. That time has included both government and private sector roles, such as serving as an Ambassador, Chief of Staff at the Federal Communications Commission, and holding senior positions at AT&T, CTIA, and, until recently, as CEO of NENA – The 9-1-1 Association. But today, I speak to you as a private citizen – concerned about the future of the 9-1-1 system and those who work tirelessly every day to help those in need.

My goals today are clear: I ask Congress to support the dedicated 9-1-1 professionals by reclassifying them as what they have long-proven to be, Public Safety Professionals, and to fully fund the Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) system.

Mr. Chairman, our 9-1-1 professionals are currently misclassified as *administrative or clerical* staff, similar to receptionists or secretaries, rather than as *public safety personnel* like their colleagues in law enforcement. This misclassification is another relic of legacy 9-1-1 systems—when the public called, 9-1-1 answered, and just dispatched.

Today, they do much more.

They handle medical triage, such as CPR, and provide crucial situational awareness for field responders. They undergo rigorous training to learn the many standards, technologies, and procedures they must follow.

Representative Torres, a former dispatcher herself, and Representative Fitzpatrick—along with Senators Blackburn and Klobuchar—have long championed the 9-1-1 SAVES Act. This zero-cost bill would reclassify 9-1-1 telecommunicators as what they are, Public Safety Personnel. These professionals support us during our most harrowing moments and share in the trauma we face at that time. As such, they deserve to be recognized alongside their colleagues in field response as Public Safety Personnel.

Why is this important?

Aside from recognizing the life-saving work they do, this misclassification led to 9-1-1 professionals not having access to personal protective equipment during the COVID pandemic. Furthermore, many telecommunicators coordinate field responders and operate with them in the field.

Now, let me talk about the urgent need for the NG9-1-1 system.

The 9-1-1 system is often the first point of contact between citizens and emergency field responders. We are told that *If You See Something, Say Something*, and when that *something* is seen, 9-1-1 is typically called. In today's world of school shootings, man-made and natural disasters, 9-1-1 serves as the first triage and coordinator of responses. Many of the nation's 9-1-1 systems are rooted in last-century, voice-centric technology. As a result, someone ordering pizza via a mobile app can share more information with Domino's than with 9-1-1.

Much has changed since 1968, when the first 9-1-1 system was introduced.

Originally, 9-1-1 was simply a landline call from a fixed-location phone with a registered address that was answered by an operator who dispatched help. Today, that is no longer the case.

We live in a data-driven world.

NENA estimates that 80% (most likely nearly 90%) of all 9-1-1 calls now come from wireless devices—sometimes while in a moving vehicle. Furthermore, the smartphones used to make these calls can push and pull immense data, including life-saving information such as medical information, location, details of automobile accidents, videos enabling setting context, text messages, and more.

Legacy 9-1-1 systems were not designed to receive photos, location data, texts, or other important information relevant to the emergency.

The answer to this dilemma is the suite of technologies provided by the move to the NG 9-1-1 system. Information-rich 9-1-1 calls will help in responding to emergencies.

In a nutshell, NG9-1-1 is a suite of technologies based on commonly accepted standards that will *fully* modernize 9-1-1 systems—bringing 9-1-1 into the 21<sup>st</sup>-century digital age. NG9-1-1 also includes enhanced cybersecurity protection, redundancy, increased resiliency during natural or man-made disasters, and the ability for 9-1-1 centers to transfer calls along with accompanying data between centers. With technological advances, an entire ecosystem of commercial vendors now exists, and they are continually creating new ways to improve emergency communications.

Today, NG9-1-1 technology is available, but NG9-1-1 *only works* if 9-1-1 centers across the nation can acquire the necessary technologies. Here lies the issue — the cost of deploying NG9-1-1 systems while maintaining costly legacy systems. This transition cost adds financial strain to communities, states, tribal lands, and territories, and unfortunately, not all can afford the transition. Without government funding, we risk creating a nation of haves and have-nots. The sooner the transition to NG9-1-1 occurs, the sooner legacy systems can be phased out. NextGen 9-1-1 thrives in a robust, interoperable commercial ecosystem that uses widely accepted standards, allowing each 9-1-1 center to select the vendor that best meets its community's needs.

We saw an important component of NG9-1-1 in action in North Carolina during Hurricane Helene last year. Many of North Carolina's 9-1-1 centers have transitioned to an

Emergency Services IP Networks, or ESINet, which allows them to geo-fence affected areas and allows other 9-1-1 centers to handle all emergency calls within those areas. This eases the stress on field responders and impacted communities. While an ESINet is an important part of NextGen 9-1-1—and North Carolina has made significant investments in its systems — as impressive as it is even when fully implemented – ESInets alone are not enough for NG9-1-1. More importantly, until the *entire* country fully deploys NG 9-1-1, no center or state, regardless of their investment, will be able to fully realize the system’s benefits.

In 2012, Congress authorized a study to determine the cost of fully deploying NG 9-1-1. This study, which took *six years* to complete, estimated that \$8 to \$12 billion was needed for NG 9-1-1 deployment. Adjusted for inflation, that amounts to roughly \$15 billion, though this figure has probably changed due to state and local investments. Previous bipartisan bills proposed using FCC spectrum auction revenues to fund this effort, but that option is no longer available.

I want to thank Chairman Hudson, Vice Chair Allen, Ranking Member Pallone, and Matsui for their bipartisan support during the markup of the reconciliation bill and previous statements. I hope Congress recognizes this as the emergency it is and establishes a consistent funding stream that can be accessed easily and efficiently by states and local governments for deployment.

I would also note that concern about NG9-1-1 deployment is not limited to members of Congress. In January 2024, 9 former FCC Chairs from both Republican and Democratic administrations sent a letter to Congress underscoring the need to fully fund NG 9-1-1 deployment. Never in the history of the FCC has 9 former FCC chairs signed a letter of support for any issue. This letter underscores the significance of this request.

Unfortunately, everyone in this room will at some point—often during their worst moments—call 9-1-1 to seek help for themselves, a loved one, their community, or as a good Samaritan. When you make that call, you want to ensure you get the *best* response possible, are able to transmit vital information, including photos and videos, and receive the life-saving support you need.

Any further delay compromises our communities' public safety. Waiting for another cost analysis to be completed is not the answer, and it is, in fact, a delay. The answer is for Congress to recognize the importance of funding NG 9-1-1 now. It is imperative that Congress be creative with a funding source for our emergency systems, which are the backbone of our community's public safety.

The time to fund the NG9-1-1 systems is now; failing to do so will limit the public's ability to have information-rich 9-1-1 services that better enable appropriate field responses. Furthermore, as the nation increasingly adopts an IP telecommunications infrastructure, outdated legacy systems will continue to become more expensive to maintain. 9-1-1 Centers cannot turn off these systems until every center has fully deployed NG9-1-1. And these costs are becoming increasingly burdensome.

Thank you for your focus on these critical issues and your commitment to Public Safety Communications.

###

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

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

**STATEMENT OF RANDALL C. WRIGHT**

Mr. WRIGHT. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. I am Randy Wright, executive director of the media properties at the University of Florida and general manager of WUFT, which are noncommercial public radio and television stations. Our mission at WUFT and the University of Florida extends across the State of Florida but also the State of South Carolina through transformative public safety initiatives, Florida public radio emergency network, and a new initiative called BEACON, which is an—

Mr. GOLDMAN. Mr. Wright, your microphone is not on.

Mr. WRIGHT. You know, you would think—you would think, starting in radio at the age of 14—right?

Mr. GOLDMAN. We can hear your voice fine, but that was—

Mr. WRIGHT. But let's do it with the mic on. Should I start over or continue?

Mr. HUDSON. Continue.

Mr. WRIGHT. Just continue. OK. I apologize for that.

We have recently launched the new AI-driven initiative in Florida called BEACON, and we have done this in partnership with the Florida Division of Emergency Management and executive director Kevin Guthrie.

WUFT and my colleagues in Florida and South Carolina are among 1,300 public radio and 360 public television stations that form America's public safety communications infrastructure. These stations reach our entire Nation with reliable emergency alerting services in a noncommercial environment that is free of sensationalism. This public media technical infrastructure forms the backbone of our Nation's alerting capabilities.

The public radio satellite system connects all of these stations, enabling immediate national emergency alerts to be shared on the most resilient medium, which is over-the-air radio.

Many people aren't aware that the PBS WARN system serves as one of only two conduits to the Nation for our wireless emergency alerts. This critical broadcast infrastructure serves as the last mile for public safety and emergency alerts to reach Americans, and that must be protected.

WUFT's FPREN, or Florida Public Radio Emergency Network, launched in 2013, really exemplifies public media's power in crisis, and it relies heavily on the power and reach of broadcast transmission. FPREN, which serves every public radio and television station in Florida and in South Carolina, doesn't merely respond to disasters. Our team, working in collaboration with our public media partners, anticipates these disasters. Before Hurricane Milton arrived last year, FPREN was already mobilizing, delivering active updates in English and Spanish across both States of Florida and South Carolina. When the power failed, cellular and internet service were lost, FPREN came through loud and clear, through

public radio transmitters providing critically important updates during and following that crisis.

The University of Florida, as one of the Nation's leading public land grant institutions, has pioneered technologies that truly transform public broadcasting infrastructure into community lifelines.

WUFT provides the only consistent local news source for much of north Florida, including rural areas with no other news outlets. This journalistic depth powers our position as a lifeline for fact-based public safety and emergency information that saves lives and property in partnership with emergency management agencies statewide.

UF is truly a hotbed for a variety of public safety initiatives, including a current effort with AT&T FirstNet to develop safer places, which allows our University of Florida research teams and law enforcement to advance solutions to better protect against situations like active assailants.

There is absolutely no greater calling than the safety of our Nation, and UF and WUFT continue to lead in partnership with and alongside local, State, and Federal agencies.

Now, WUFT, as I mentioned, just developed BEACON within the last 2 years. This is a revolutionary 24-hour, always-on alerting channel that utilizes artificial intelligence to continuously and immediately broadcast only official public safety alerts. BEACON broadcasts on dedicated public radio frequencies, it streams online, and it reaches mobile devices through the BEACON app. Serving communities in multiple languages, BEACON provides a commercial and news-free sanctuary where nothing but those official alerts get out without distraction.

Developed in coordination and partnership with the Florida Division of Emergency Management, WUFT and the University of Florida have already established numerous BEACON stations across Florida, representing America's and, quite frankly, the world's first comprehensive alerting channel, with more BEACON sites to launch in the weeks to come.

Local emergency management leaders at the county level—like Jen Grice in Alachua County, Florida, John Schultz in Lee County, Florida—have fully embraced BEACON, along with other county-level leaders already incorporating the solution into their community engagement strategies.

This marriage of FPREN and BEACON creates a comprehensive solution delivering trusted coverage alongside official alerts directly from emergency management agencies.

What this means is that these are solutions that serve all Americans—urban or rural, rich or poor—with comprehensive, immediate, and ongoing alerting. With the recent rescission of Federal funding support for public broadcasting, which directly impacts this infrastructure that is so critical to the alerting last mile, we urge Congress to find new pathways of support for these critical services and for innovative solutions like FPREN and BEACON.

Public media's infrastructure represents an irreplaceable national asset for emergency communications, particularly serving rural and underserved communities where alternatives are prohibitively expensive.

In the public broadcasting sphere, we are very proud and consider ourselves to be a utility for the American people—a must-have, not a nice-to-have. Public broadcasting and our infrastructure truly consist—become America’s alerting first responders.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Wright follows:]

## **Written Statement of Randall C. Wright**

**Executive Director, Division of Media Properties at the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications**

**Hearing on Public Safety Communications in the United States  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
September 9, 2025**

### **Summary Page**

- The University of Florida’s WUFT-TV and WUFT-FM have worked in partnership with the Florida Division of Emergency Management and local county and community-level emergency management and public safety agencies in the development and deployment of innovative and impactful public alerting initiatives that have been proven to be highly effective and efficient.
- WUFT’s “FPREN”, the Florida Public Radio Emergency Network, was launched in 2013 and provides award-winning live and ongoing coverage of local and regional public safety crisis situations.
- WUFT, the University of Florida and the Florida Division of Emergency Management developed and are launching BEACON, the Broadcast Emergency Alerts and Communications Operations Network, an “always-on” broadcast alerting channel.
- The public broadcasting technical infrastructure stands as the nation’s “last mile” for ensuring local, state and federal alerts can reach the American population, on the most resilient medium, over the air radio. We urge Congress to invest in supporting this critical public safety alerting infrastructure to further enhance initiatives like FPREN and BEACON.

## **Written Statement of Randall C. Wright**

**Executive Director, Division of Media Properties at the University of Florida College of Journalism and Communications**

**Hearing on Public Safety Communications in the United States  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives  
September 9, 2025**

Good morning, Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. It is my privilege to address you today on a matter of profound importance to every American community. I am Randy Wright, Executive Director of Media Properties at the University of Florida and General Manager of WUFT, a locally owned, noncommercial public radio and television station. While our broadcasts reach the Gainesville-Ocala region through WUFT-TV and FM, our mission extends far beyond—across the entire states of Florida and South Carolina through transformative public safety initiatives: the Florida Public Radio Emergency Network and Beacon, the Broadcast Emergency Alerts and Communications Operations Network. This groundbreaking AI-driven alerting system, launched this year in partnership with the Florida Division of Emergency Management and local emergency leaders, exemplifies the innovation possible when public media embraces its highest calling. Our collaboration with Executive Director Kevin Guthrie and FDEM sets a standard of what can be achieved when we harness public media's power to protect lives.

WUFT stands proudly among more than 1,300 public radio and 360 public television stations that form the backbone of America's news and public safety communications infrastructure. These stations create a network reaching 99% of all Americans with reliable emergency alerting services, delivered with integrity in a non-commercial environment free from sensationalism.

The Public Radio Satellite System weaves these stations together, enabling national emergency alerts throughout the public radio system. When the President needs to reach every American simultaneously, the PRSS receives direct feeds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, delivering critical messages through a communication pathway that remains steadfast even when internet systems falter. This represents more than technology—it embodies our commitment to national resilience.

Our work at WUFT and FPREN, a collective of 14 public media stations in Florida and the statewide public broadcasting network in South Carolina, reveals the power of public media in a crisis. Consider this: last year, well before Hurricane Milton arrived on our coast, WUFT's FPREN was already mobilizing, delivering critical updates in English and Spanish to public broadcasting stations across these two disaster-prone coastal states.

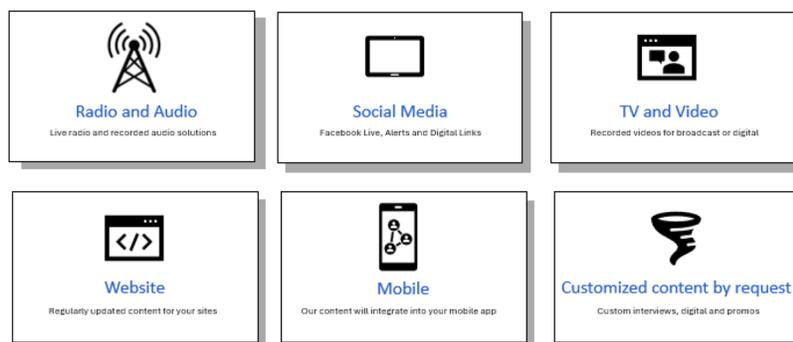
## The FPREN Timeline

- The Florida Public Radio Emergency Network (FPREN) began in 2013 when WUFT-FM at the University of Florida spearheaded a statewide emergency broadcast system via public radio stations.
- FPREN has always provided full coverage of the state of Florida through its network of 14 public radio stations.
- Coverage of Hurricane Irma in 2017 ran over several days including nearly a full day of live radio coverage from Miami to Jacksonville.
- 2018, South Carolina added with the formation of the South Carolina Emergency Information Network. Coverage of hurricane Florence happens days later.
- The service has provided coverage for Florida and South Carolina through multiple storms, snowstorms and hurricanes ever since.



This proactive approach captures the essence of the FPREN model—our team doesn't merely respond to disasters; we anticipate them, preparing communities before storm clouds gather. When catastrophic events like hurricanes Michael, Irma and Milton battered our coastlines, FPREN emerged as a reliable voice cutting through chaos, providing factual information when communities needed it most desperately. When Milton pounded the Tampa area, a region served by public media station WUSF, FPREN and the public media system provided support for 24-hour coverage and response to the storm, working in coordination to ensure the region had the public safety alerts and information that was so desperately needed.

## FPREN Media Platforms



For more than a decade, the University of Florida has stood at the forefront of a quiet revolution—pioneering technologies and operational models that transform public broadcasting infrastructure into lifelines for communities in crisis. Through UF's nationally acclaimed College of Journalism and Communications, WUFT has embraced a dual mission: serving the public while nurturing the next generation of journalists and communicators, instilling in them a

commitment to service and responsibility to our fellow Americans. In addition to our commitment to public safety, we provide the only consistent source of local news to much of North Florida, including rural areas that have no other news sources at all. It is the depth of our journalism in those communities that powers our position as a lifeline for fact-based emergency information and alerts that saves property and lives.

UF's priority of public safety work extends to an ongoing partnership with AT&T, where another example of an effective public-private partnership is driving innovation using AI to develop Safer Places, which allows UF's research teams and law enforcement to use our corporate partners' technologies like AT&T FirstNet's advanced communications to target how to better prevent and protect against active assailant scenarios making our nation's communities safer. Public safety initiatives are at the core of the University of Florida's wide-ranging global impact and at the core of our institutional DNA as one of the largest and most impactful land grant institutions in America.

Our "FPREN" and "BEACON" initiatives represent more than technological achievements—they embody the potential for public media to serve as America's information first responder in times of crisis. The remarkable success of FPREN in Florida inspired us to extend our reach northward, forging a partnership with South Carolina's public media network in 2018. Today, through SCETV's broadcast systems, we deliver the same life-saving model to the Palmetto State. This extraordinary partnership has earned national recognition and a Florida TaxWatch award, testament to our stewardship of taxpayer resources.



I think the TV inclusion is awesome! Post-storm and during the calm, I'd be interested if the TV stations heard from their viewers about the new addition, and if you all saw an uptick in the number of downloads of the Florida Storms app. Very nice work, Randy.

Anne Bradman, Former CPB VP/Government Relations

Thanks to you and your team, Randy. We sounded just the way we wanted to: calm and focused on the right information for our audience. Ray is a great addition to your team and I appreciated that Cyndee is still available. Good luck as you continue your coverage up to SC.

JoAnn, WUSF Tampa-St. Petersburg

Thanks Randy! Such critical information and service. Corey and Amy – we're here for anything. Let us know. D



*Dolores Sukhdeo*  
Dolores Sukhdeo | President & CEO  
Office: 561.364.4400 | Mobile: 305.613.8132  
Email: [dsukhdeo@southfloridapbs.org](mailto:dsukhdeo@southfloridapbs.org)

Gets tell you all! It's things like FPREN and RPM that make me love working in Florida.

I've worked at the national level here and there and been in public radio for an awful long time. Nowhere else does such a diverse group of people work together so collegially and in such good spirits! It's a joy to get things done without 20 page M OUs! Jeff and the FPREN team... I only wish we had you in Baltimore during Snowmageddon a several years ago. You all make our sound, lighten our staff's load and enhance our sound. See you all soon.

Steve And the WMFE staff Stephen Yazko | Interim President and General Manager Director of Content and Audience Development | [stephen@wmfe.org](mailto:stephen@wmfe.org)

Hope you are all doing well. Know you are busy. Just wanted to take a minute and say thank you to you and the team for all the good work and help you are providing.

Thank you.

Anthony Padgett, Former CEO  
South Carolina ETV and South Carolina Public Radio

### Florida and South Carolina Partner Feedback & Testimonials

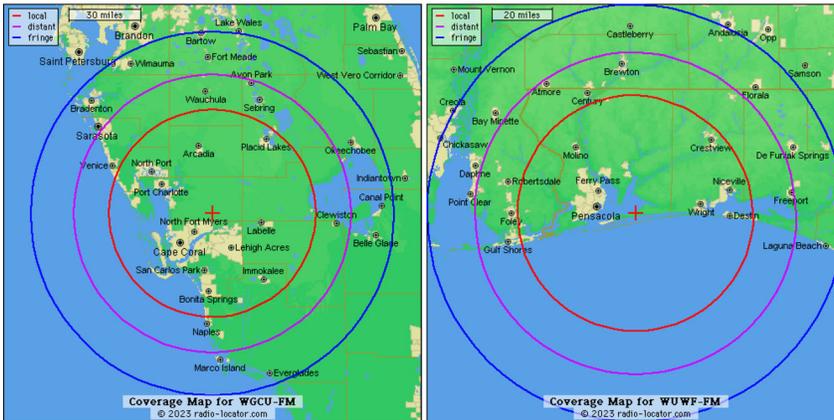
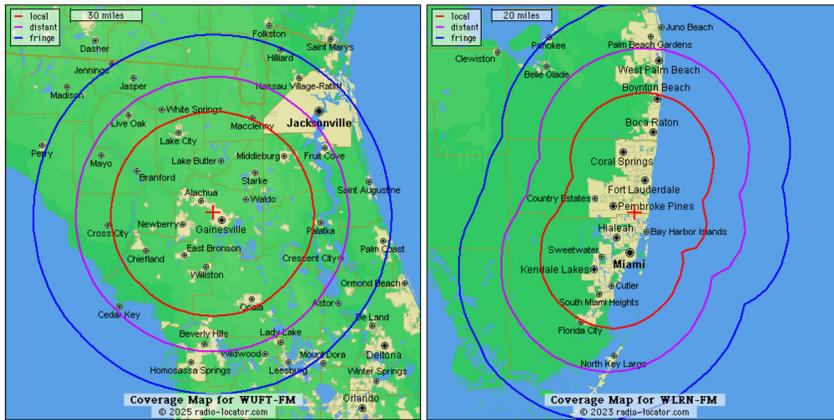
Now, we're writing the next chapter of emergency communications through Project BEACON—the Broadcast Emergency Alerts and Communications Operations Network, a revolutionary 24-hour instant alerting channel that harnesses artificial intelligence to continuously broadcast the latest official public safety alerts and advisories from every level of government. BEACON incorporates sophisticated non-generative AI to create an "always on" alerting channel that broadcasts on dedicated radio frequencies, streams online, and reaches mobile devices through an app easily found by searching "Beacon 24/7 Alerts." These dedicated radio frequencies are made possible through public broadcasting's transmission infrastructure.

# BEACON

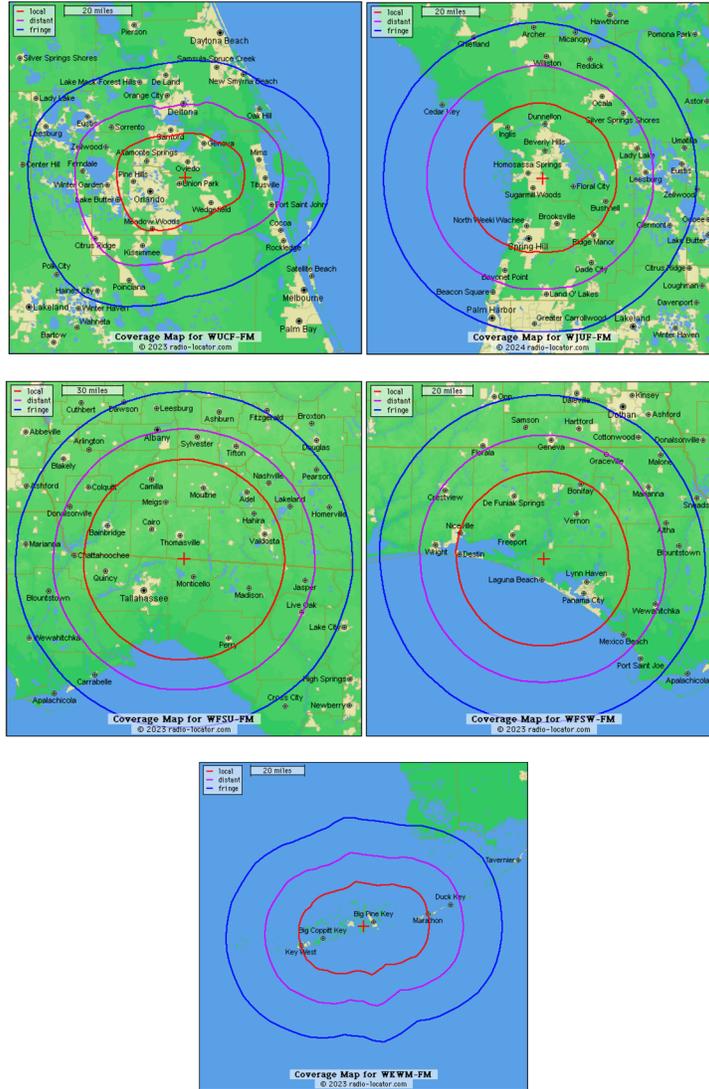
SAFETY FIRST. ALWAYS ON.

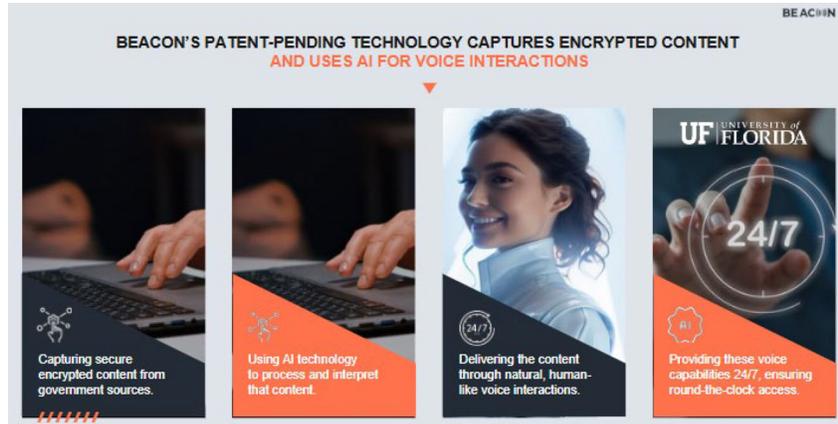
BEACON: Broadcast Emergency Alerts and Communications Operations Network

24/7/365 Broadcast Signals Utilizing Public Broadcasting Infrastructure



Beacon Broadcast Signals Extend from Pensacola to Panama City, Orlando and Miami to a Dedicated Beacon Alerting Channel for the Highly Vulnerable Florida Keys





Rooted in the most dependable medium—over-the-air broadcast radio—BEACON serves communities around the clock in both English, Spanish and multiple other languages, providing a commercial-free sanctuary where official alerts and advisories reach citizens without distraction or interference and in their native languages. Developed hand-in-hand with the Florida Division of Emergency Management, we have established numerous BEACON sites across Florida, with additional installations launching imminently. This represents America's, and the world's, first comprehensive alerting channel, born from collaboration between the University of Florida's WUFT, FDEM and local emergency management leaders throughout the state.

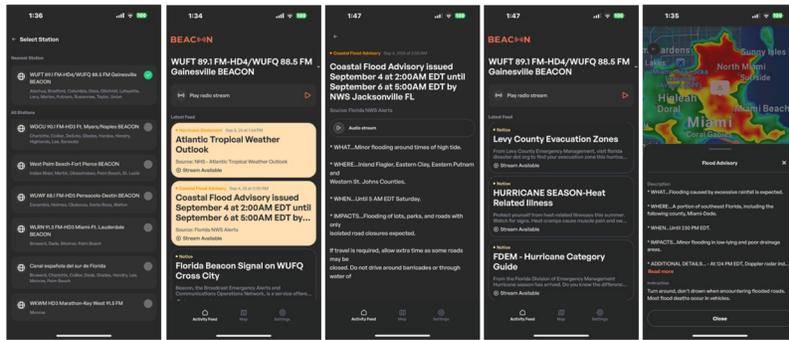
Visionary leaders like Jen Grice in Alachua County, recently honored as Florida's emergency management program of the year, and John Schultz in Lee County, guardian of southwest Florida's vulnerable coastline around Ft. Myers, have embraced BEACON technology and built it into their comprehensive safety strategies. WUFT's BEACON partnership with Alachua

County emergency management exemplifies this collaboration, while Fort Myers' public broadcaster WGPU provides a 24-hour dedicated radio channel for BEACON throughout southwest Florida, supporting Director Schultz, his team and other adjacent counties and communities in protecting the entire region. The University of Florida and WUFT are proud to have developed this unique new technology in direct collaboration with emergency management in Florida and see an incredible opportunity for sharing the highly effective alerting tool with other states across the nation.



The BEACON mobile app featuring Immediate Alerting from Official Government Agencies at the Local, County, State and Federal Level / Multilingual Text and Audio / User Controlled

Each BEACON Radio Station is Streamed LIVE and Available through the BEACON Alerting App / Designed to Seamlessly Share iPAWS Alerts and Agency Self-Generated Warnings, Advisories and Alerts



BEACON mobile app showing various live audio streams available, live radar, IPAWS delivered alerts and highly localized county-issued alerts

**Public Television's Critical Role in National Emergency Communications**

The public television system, through the PBS Warning Alert Response Network (PBS WARN), serves as critical distribution infrastructure for the nation's Wireless Emergency Alert (WEA) system. This unique public-private partnership between FEMA, the FCC, and industry was established by Congress in 2006 for sending locally targeted and nationwide emergency messages to mobile devices of participating cellular carriers. Between January 1, 2024, and January 1, 2025, over 11,000 WEAs—a 30% increase over the prior year—were issued by over 1,900 federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial authorities and transmitted over PBS WARN throughout the country.

The public television interconnection system's 99.9% operational reliability and local public television stations' broadcast signal covering nearly 97% of the U.S. population make PBS WARN the perfect partner for this vital role. Wireless Emergency Alerts travel through the public television interconnection system and local public television stations' broadcast spectrum to participating cellular carriers, providing a technologically diverse pathway that remains operational even if the internet is disrupted.

Recent examples of life-saving WEAs transmitted over PBS WARN include more than 100 missing child and AMBER alerts in at least 27 states, hundreds of severe weather alerts protecting communities across Iowa, Mississippi, and Texas, evacuation notices for California wildfires, and 44 tornado warnings in Florida alone.

Since 2016, public television has partnered with the Department of Homeland Security to conduct pilot projects demonstrating how stations' dedicated spectrum and infrastructure can

send encrypted data—video, files, images, and text—from local authorities to first responders. This datacasting technology operates independently of broadband, serves rural and remote areas through public television's extensive reach, and provides a one-to-many communications system that never overloads.

The technology has proven invaluable across multiple scenarios:

- **Enhanced Emergency Response:** In North Carolina, PBS North Carolina works with the state's FirstTech program to deliver improved paging structures for first responders. Tennessee's statewide datacasting system provides secure communication between first responders and management teams during disasters.
- **Improved Interoperability:** Datacasting allows all responding agencies to see the same data simultaneously, regardless of location, significantly improving response time and success rates.
- **Over-Water Communications:** DHS pilots have demonstrated datacasting's effectiveness in reaching offshore areas where traditional communications fail, extending coverage up to 60 miles or more.
- **Rural Search and Rescue:** Washington state pilots showed how datacasting assists remote mountainous search and rescue operations by sharing helicopter imagery with ground responders.
- **Enhanced School Safety:** A 2018 DHS pilot in Adams County, Indiana demonstrated datacasting's ability to share video feeds, building blueprints, and campus maps with first responders during school emergency situations.

- **Earthquake Early Warning:** California public television stations have reduced earthquake alert times from 30 seconds to less than 3 seconds for first responders.

#### **Critical Infrastructure Funding Needs**

FPREN, BEACON and all of these critical services depend on a reliable and resilient public broadcasting infrastructure. However, in many cases, station infrastructure is being used well past its expected useful life and is at serious risk of failure. WUFT-TV, the University of Florida's full-power public television station is currently operating at reduced power due to our primary transmitter being out of date with the station unable to obtain parts to remedy the situation. WUFT has applied for two NGWS (Next Generation Warning System) grants only to see that grant program, with more than \$100 million already appropriated by Congress, stalling and now in question at FEMA. WUFT's strategy was to replace the aging television transmitter with a new ATSC 3.0 capable system and immediately begin testing BEACON, UF's highly impactful partnership project with the Florida Division of Emergency Management, in the new television standard.

A study commissioned by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting found a backlog of \$300 million in unmet infrastructure needs at public media stations through 2020. In the most recent Next Generation Warning System grant cycle, CPB received grant applications from stations in 49 states totaling approximately \$110 million in funding for needed public safety projects—including WUFT's BEACON application—well outpacing the available financial resources.

This aging infrastructure—transmitters, antennas, encoders, receivers, power generators and related hardware, software, and electrical equipment—endangers the ability of public

broadcasting to continue providing life-saving public safety services. We urge Congress to provide continued level funding of \$40 million for the Next Generation Warning System in FY 2026, which will help address the overwhelming need for station infrastructure maintenance, upgrades and replacements to enhance the reliability and resiliency of public broadcasting's public safety and homeland security services.

As our nation confronts a relentless succession of natural disasters, WUFT, the University of Florida, and the Florida Division of Emergency Management continue crafting innovative solutions designed for seamless national deployment. We remain steadfast in ensuring that rural and underserved communities receive equal access to these life-protecting tools. The marriage of FPREN and BEACON creates a comprehensive solution that rides upon public broadcasting's nationwide infrastructure, delivering both trusted event coverage free from commercial influence and official alerts flowing directly from emergency management agencies to individual communities. This vision represents the future of public safety alerting—public media's resilient broadcast infrastructure serving as America's shield against disaster.

### A story from “Current” following Hurricane Ian

In addition to reporting by its own staff from the studio and in the field, WGCU depended heavily on the statewide Florida Emergency Radio Emergency Network, based at the University of Florida in Gainesville, which was safely out of the storm's path.

“Those guys are phenomenal,” Trueblood said. “It is such an excellent resource to have. ... A team of meteorologists tells you the conditions, what to expect [and] what the storm is doing.” That coverage allowed WGCU's team to focus on reporting about “evacuations and shelters and where to get resources and what to do.” There was some overlap in the reporting, “but between the two of us it was just perfect coverage for what we were doing.”

Kevin Trueblood, WGCU, Ft. Myers-Naples

**Current**  
NEWS FOR PEOPLE IN PUBLIC MEDIA



Throughout Florida and South Carolina, WUFT's FPREN has weathered nature's most ferocious assaults, standing firm against hurricanes, storms, and floods while maintaining seamless transmission of vital safety information from local, state, and federal agencies. Many public radio stations serve as Primary Entry Point stations for alerts and warnings, integrated into more than 35 states' emergency plans. Without this public radio infrastructure, governments would face staggering costs to replace these essential services, particularly in rural communities where vast distances and sparse populations make alternative solutions prohibitively expensive.

We know that the safety of all Americans is first and foremost on your mind, and the public media system is proud to fulfill its mission as noncommercial, nonprofit, locally owned community organizations bringing emergency alerting services to your constituents every day. Unfortunately, public media's universal service in emergency alerting, along with its vital role as a news source, increasingly ignored by other media, is at risk due to the recent rescission of federal funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. This rescission affects every public media station right now, resulting in loss of grant funding and shared services the CPB funded, including technology that supports emergency alerting.

WUFT and all of my public media colleagues remain committed to fulfilling our public service mission, but the reality is that some stations, particularly those in rural areas, will not survive this funding loss, and we will see gaps emerge in emergency services availability to those communities. We urge Congress to find new pathways to support these critical services from public media stations and to support the further development and deployment of innovative solutions like FPREN and BEACON across America. The Next Generation Warning System

funding represents a crucial investment in our nation's public safety infrastructure and the civil defense capabilities that protect every American community.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today and welcome you to visit FPREN and the University of Florida to learn more about public media's essential role in public safety communications.

## The FPREN / SCEIN Team



**Randy Wright**  
*Executive Director*



**Tim Miller**  
*Chief Meteorologist*



**Megan Borowski**  
*Senior Meteorologist*



**Irene Sans**  
*Bilingual Meteorologist*



**Tom Hudson**  
*Host*



**Rob Harder**  
*Host*

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you, Mr. Wright.

We will now begin a period of questions from Members. I will recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Mr. Newton, thank you for being here today. You talked about 2024, Hurricane Helene tore through western North Carolina, causing widespread damage and more than 100 fatalities. Understand a significant portion of the communications infrastructure was destroyed, per your testimony, and several of the call centers—the 19 call centers were out of commission.

Can you talk about how North Carolina's statewide Next Generation 9-1-1 system helped public safety officials respond to this disaster?

Mr. NEWTON. Thank you for the question.

The 19 PSAPs that were taken offline—because of fiber line cuts, primarily—were able to be rerouted. And so because the calls are managed from a digital level on this ESInet that we have statewide with all 124 PSAPs, that if their normal call rerouting plan isn't appropriate because of call volume and things like that, the Network Management Center, operation center, the NMC, is able to then reprovision and turn those calls to another 9-1-1 center that is not impacted.

In fact, one of the communities that was impacted, Mitchell County—I believe it is Mitchell—we received calls for them for 30 days after the event, which means that—I call 9-1-1 from western North Carolina, I get help from a trained, equipped professional. And then that call itself—and I need fire, I need EMS, I need police—is able to be routed back to somebody who actually dispatches it.

Mr. HUDSON. That is amazing.

You know, Next Generation 9-1-1, as has been said by several witnesses, is the next critical step in improving our Nation's public safety communication system. It will allow for more advanced types of communications, as you have mentioned, increase interoperability, like the example you gave, and increase cybersecurity. However, these systems are complex and require careful planning and expertise for implementation.

Dr. Fontes, how can Congress be an effective partner in ensuring the success—successful nationwide deployment of Next Generation 9-1-1 technology?

Dr. FONTES. Thank you.

I think first and foremost is to provide the funding necessary to transition to Next Generation 9-1-1. Communities across the country, while maintaining legacy systems at their cost, also are beginning or need to begin making the investment to Next Generation 9-1-1. It is a costly endeavor. And the longer the timeframe between the legacy 9-1-1 system sunset and the deployment of Next Generation 9-1-1, the greater the cost is going to be to the community.

So the easiest, the quickest—and I say “quickest” not to give any false impression that it is going to be an overnight activity—but, if the dollars were there, the planning and the completion of those that already began their plans can take place to ensure that our Nation has the best available Next Generation 9-1-1 systems.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you for that.

Sheriff Dicus, San Bernardino County, as you said, is more than 20,000 square miles and geographically very diverse, including urban density, national forests, Mojave Desert. Does just one communication service or technology reach every part of your jurisdiction? And, if not, how does your department handle that and ensure that you have got maximum communication across the county?

Sheriff DICUS. Chairman, that is an excellent question.

So it is really a combination of multiple systems. So, for instance, in our computer, in terms of answering calls for deputy sheriffs, we run two communication cards. One is FirstNet, and the other is a Verizon card. And the reason is, is coverage for a county that vast—I mean, it takes 4 and a half hours to drive across. And then, of course, our legacy 800 megahertz systems, which really is the backbone that we depend on, having the ability for a deputy to get on a radio or get on a cell phone and accomplish the tasks that they have been asked to do.

Mr. HUDSON. Appreciate that.

This question, I guess, would be for anybody here, but what—it is sort of a—build on what I asked Dr. Fontes. I understand funding is an issue, but are there other things Congress can do to sort of help cut through and make this nationwide deployment possible? Are there other issues out there that we need to resolve or intervene on behalf of that you can think of? I would open that to any of the witnesses.

Sheriff DICUS. I will take it, Chairman.

It has been my own experience—governance and policy issues, when you are talking about critical infrastructure that is replacing across the country, especially when you are going through different jurisdictions that obviously have different policies and different governance, creating a national standard so that you can overcome those types of obstructions, making sure we are able to build out that critical infrastructure so that we can all communicate across the boards, is what I would say is really important for this group to take a look at and provide that consistency and that platform for the buildout for all the States.

Mr. HUDSON. All right.

Dr. FONTES. I would like to add to that. The obvious importance, of course, is planning. And so I think it is important that, if funding were made available, it is important to recognize how that funding is made available. Is it something that you do on an incremental basis? A first tranche of funding for planning and early roll-out? A second tranche of funding for the deployment? And, of course, the final tranche for completion.

So I am asking that Congress can be creative in how they fund Next Generation 9–1–1. The governance aspect is vitally important. You want to make sure that, however funds are available, that those funds work within the processes, the procedures, that State 9–1–1 administrators and local governments actually have in place in order to utilize the funding that would be available for the purpose of deploying Next Generation 9–1–1.

Mr. HUDSON. Great. I appreciate that.

At this time, I will recognize our ranking member, the gentlelady from California, for 5 minutes for her questions.

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

California public broadcasting stations like Sacramento's KVIE play a critical role in public safety, from providing wildfire outbreak alerts to delivering early earthquake warnings within seconds. This summer, President Trump and congressional Republicans gutted more than \$1 billion in funding to our local public television and radio stations, funding that our local stations rely on to provide a failsafe path for Americans to receive lifesaving emergency alerts, warnings, and evacuation routes.

Mr. Wright, I think you agree what we need this public funding. It is really critical for public safety. And—I say this too, but can private, for-profit networks sufficiently replace public media's role in public safety communications?

Mr. WRIGHT. Thank you, Congresswoman. I appreciate your question.

You know, I think that public broadcasting, to start with, is very unique in our media ecosystem here in the country. The rescission has had profound impacts already in terms of local services that stations like yours in Sacramento have been able to make but now may be having to cut.

I think the unique advantages that the public broadcasting infrastructure brings to bear are what we need to focus on. And some of those are we have a unified approach; we have a system that reaches the entire country; we have a culture that is built around public safety and public service. It is not a profit motive that is incorporated into our DNA. Our DNA and our culture is built around public safety and public service.

So do I think that we are uniquely qualified with the investment that the American people have made through the decades to really take advantage of this infrastructure? To enhance public safety? To enhance service to the American people? I think the future belongs to public broadcasting when it comes to creating these public safety solutions.

Ms. MATSUI. Right. I agree with you there.

This committee played a pivotal role in standing up the nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network, or FirstNet. I have long advocated for a strong effective governance over FirstNet, as it holds significant responsibility over the use of highly valuable spectrum and public funding.

Dr. Fontes, is FirstNet solving public safety communications needs? If you had a power to fund additional public safety priorities, what would you focus on, and how much might it cost?

Dr. FONTES. Yes. Going back—thank you for that question, actually. I am going back now several years.

Public—

Ms. MATSUI. Not too far back now because we don't have much time here.

Dr. FONTES. I know. Believe me.

The fact of the matter is public safety did not have access to a nationwide public safety broadband network. Now, we call this FirstNet, or the FirstNet authority that oversees this public safety broadband network. I am not here to say that that network should be sunsetted. What I am saying is that network does provide a service. What I do believe, however, is that when you are consid-

ering the reauthorization of FirstNet that you take a look at all of the ways that have—or issues that have been identified by inspector generals' reports regarding the authorities' oversight of that.

I also believe that we are now in a world of competition in public safety broadband networks. We didn't have that in 2012. So—

Ms. MATSUI. OK.

Dr. FONTES [continuing]. We have companies like Verizon or T-Mobile or others coming online that provides opportunities for public safety to utilize broadband networks.

I believe that public safety is best served when they are in control and they are capable of making decisions as to what network—

Ms. MATSUI. OK. I want to ask Sheriff Dicus, as this committee addresses FirstNet reauthorization, how can we best strengthen our first responders' access to reliable, resilient, and dedicated communication systems?

Sheriff DICUS. Ranking Member, it is certainly my opinion—and I have experienced this firsthand in a county that is as large as San Bernardino—the buildout of FirstNet is critical, and the reason being is—I always explain it is what is in the dirt that supports us. So we talked about fiber, and some of my colleagues up here. There is a lot of these things that are not in the ground, but yet we still respond to critical infrastructure. And, in my county, we are talking about rare earth minerals and things as you spread out to the unpopulated areas of the county that could still potentially be attacked. So the buildout of FirstNet to provide that priority broadband system to be able to move that information is critically important.

Also, there are layers of this, and the layers look something like not just getting the call to the first responder but managing it, getting him the best intelligence, being able to transfer pictures, being able to transfer audio where a lot of drone technology is coming into public safety right now, being able to do real-time video. And it takes a broadband network to be able to transfer modern types of communications.

Ms. MATSUI. OK. Thank you very much. And I have run out of time, so I yield.

Mr. HUDSON. I thank the gentlelady.

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

Mr. GUTHRIE. Thank you.

I want to start with the sheriff. In Kentucky, we have 120 counties, and in the—our founding fathers decided they wanted a county seat within a horse—a day's horseback ride you can go back and forth. So we have a lot of counties. So I remember driving to—from Nevada to Las Vegas, and I looked at my wife and said, about 3 hours into our drive, "We have been in one county the whole time." We were in San Bernardino County. So it is good you are here because you have a perspective of an urban area and broad spaces and wide-open spaces in the hottest place—Needles, California, the hottest city in America, or something like that, if I remember.

So here we are talking about FirstNet, and that is what is important. And it was created in 2012, expires in 2027, so we have to—so Sheriff Dicus, with your experience—and I know you have

talked about it in your opening statement, some questions, but just as a user of FirstNet, what do you think we need to do different in this reauthorization that makes your job easier or better? We can serve your citizens better?

Sheriff DICUS. Well, certainly, fund it, and then continue to expand it. There are still a lot of rural areas across this country that are not covered, and having a priority-type broadband system only for public safety with preemptive technologies too—where if the traffic gets too much, say there is a disaster somewhere else, they can move to make sure that that specific agency or jurisdiction has priority within the system.

And I think, with AI, there are still so many things to come technically, having a robust broadband network to be able to ingest whatever types of new communications we are going to receive is critically important to moving public safety forward and managing major critical—

Mr. GUTHRIE. So, due to the size of your county—I don't know how many counties California has, but your county is large, as we described. You use multiple service providers across your county, right? I know that is probably necessary. And does it affect your ability to do your job by having different service providers in your own jurisdiction?

Sheriff DICUS. So, in the past, in my day on patrol, absolutely it did. You actually had to be aware of where your radios—how far they reached—phones and things of that nature. So you had to manually change the radios. Now, with modern technology, the computer actually switches between which service provider has the most signal strength, and same thing with our radio systems.

But even the manual radio systems have advanced in technology to know whether or not a deputy sheriff or a law enforcement officer may be lying on the ground versus standing straight up. So the data you are getting in terms of intelligence on the call is really second to none. And making sure we posture ourselves for that in the remote places like Needles is critically important.

Mr. GUTHRIE. The world's largest thermometer, right?

So the—so your ability to do your job, the technology has compensated for the fact you have multiple providers in your jurisdiction, so—

Sheriff DICUS. It certainly has helped, yes.

Mr. GUTHRIE. OK. Thanks.

And also, unfortunately, we have seen cyber attacks disrupt 9-1-1 systems and dispatch centers. So, Sheriff and Mr. Newton, the question: From your perspective, what more can the Federal Government do to help local law enforcement and public safety agencies strengthen their cybersecurity?

Sheriff DICUS. As I mentioned in my opening, we have experienced a cyber attack. And, as a sheriff, all of a sudden you have these conflicting issues, and number one is talking about maybe some governance or policies that relates to cybersecurity insurance for counties like mine. And the reason being is they bring in expertise to be able to manage those and get you—your systems back up.

But talking about our computer automated dispatch system, it took us down. Most sheriffs, for all of you, a lot of our local agencies rely on our backbone. So we talk about security switches—in

our case, California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System. Even though we still had voice technology to communicate to the cops on the radio, think about being able to get warrants processed. You could be out with a dangerous felon and not get it.

So absolutely 100 percent critical to keep this moving forward and look at things outside of not just the technology but also support in how to get it quickly.

Mr. GUTHRIE. OK. Mr. Newton, how can Federal Government help in cybersecurity situations?

Mr. NEWTON. I think expanding the work that we already do, the collaborations with the FBI and CISA, the Cybersecurity Infrastructure Security Agency, the common theme of reliable funding. What we see, we had a very similar experience as the sheriff in our community in which it is a continuity event for us. Our ability to do mission-essential functions is interfered with. And so our ability to, you know, bring in resources and how do we keep—how do we stay in the business of providing government services during these events.

And then I think continuation of vulnerability assessments, of looking at—it is a big patchwork quilt across this country. And especially in the world of cybersecurity, we have got to invest the time and effort into, where do we stand? Where do we need to be? How do we get better?

Mr. GUTHRIE. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. I thank the chairman.

The Chair now recognizes the ranking member of the full committee, Mr. Pallone, for your 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. PALLONE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

For more than a decade, this committee has worked to pass legislation to upgrade communication systems in 9–1–1 centers around the country, and it is a bipartisan endeavor that will improve emergency response and save lives. And that is why I was so disappointed that my Republican colleagues passed the Big Ugly Bill without any plan to use the proceeds from spectrum auctions for programs that serve the public interest like Next Generation 9–1–1.

So I have two questions, Mr. Fontes. Mr. Fontes, you have been a strong advocate for using spectrum auction proceeds to fund public safety priorities. Can you explain why authorizing the FCC's auction authority for 10 years without funding Next Generation 9–1–1 is a setback for public safety and first responders, if you will?

Dr. FONTES. Thank you. I was around when the Commission first received authorization from Congress to auction spectrum, and that has and continues to be a success. It was unfortunate that that authority lapsed.

Efforts continue to provide spectrum for our commercial and non-commercial uses. For the commercial space, an easy and efficient way to allocate and license spectrum is through auction authority. Now we are in a situation where spectrum can be auctioned but the ability to use auction revenues to fund Next Generation 9–1–1 doesn't exist. So there are opportunities here.

I would, first off, take a look at the FCC and say, "Look, I know you have proceedings in the 4.9 gig band or other proceedings here that may not fall within the purview of the restrictions or the re-

allocations of 9–1–1 funding under the reconciliation bill. Are there opportunities there to take a look at additional spectrum that could possibly be auctioned off to support funding for Next Generation 9–1–1?”

Mr. PALLONE. OK. And then the second question is that someone suggested that Congress needs to seek a new cost estimate for Next Generation 9–1–1 before passing a bill. But I think this is not only unnecessary but also further delays long-overdue action to invest in our public safety networks.

So, Dr. Fontes, do you think we need another cost estimate for Next Generation 9–1–1.

Dr. FONTES. No, but I think raising the question is an appropriate thing to ask. You know, do we need additional research or studies to assess costs? I don’t think we do. And the reasons are, first off, the FCC collects, as part of their annual 9–1–1 report, how much States are investing in Next Generation 9–1–1. So that would give a clear indication of how States are progressing in their efforts to deploy Next Generation 9–1–1.

I also think that if the allocation of funds were available and managed correctly in working with State 9–1–1 authorities, local governments, and so forth, we would be able to see how that money is rolled out and deploying Next Generation 9–1–1 so as to not just dump a pot of money and say, “OK, it is yours, have fun with it.” It is looking at a pot of money and managing it wisely. And who knows, with State investment as well as Federal investment, we may achieve Next Generation 9–1–1 sooner rather than later.

Mr. PALLONE. Well, thank you.

I am going to ask Mr. Newton and Mr. Wright, if you have time. I think you know that Mr. Bilirakis and I have a bill, the AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act. And I know, Mr. Newton, you emphasized the need to ensure access to AM radio in vehicles.

Can I ask you, Mr. Newton, and if time, Mr. Wright, can you explain why access to AM radio in vehicles is vital for protecting the public during disastrous situations, and what are the potential consequences if new vehicles do not include access to AM radio?

We will start with Mr. Newton and see if we have time for Mr. Wright.

Mr. NEWTON. Thank you, sir. The AM, it remains important to us, remains relevant to us as far as alerts and warnings. It covers greater than 90 percent of the population where Americans live now. It is something that is—you know, we enjoy that as being an existing pathway to make these notifications. As we have migrated—if vehicles are allowed to migrate away from having a—guaranteed that it has an AM radio in it, then we are faced with—we have lost a tool in the toolbox. And I think, again, it still remains relevant today, just as relevant as an IP-based tool.

Mr. PALLONE. All right. There is only 7 minutes. Mr. Wright, do you want to say anything quick?

Mr. WRIGHT. Sure. Make no mistake about it, AM radio is a critical tool in the tool chest. Fifty-two public radio stations operate in the AM band, and AM is the perfect, perfect vehicle for a project like BEACON for an always-on alerting channel.

Mr. PALLONE. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentleman from Georgia, the vice chair of the subcommittee, Mr. Allen, for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. ALLEN. Thank you, Chairman Hudson, for holding this important hearing today. And to our expert witnesses, thank you for joining us.

Last year, my district suffered catastrophic damage and loss from Hurricane Helene. This was a once-in-a-hundred-year hurricane. Never before have we seen such damage in both the central Savannah River area and all of eastern Georgia. You can imagine, hundred-year-old trees and losing 40 percent of our treescape.

And, in fact, the first press conference that we had with the Governor there, the State director was asked the question, How do we know where the shelters and the water and the food supplies will be the locations? And he said, "Go to our website." We had no power, no internet, and, of course, all the television stations were there covering the press conference, and no television for 10 days. So you can see that we have got some work to do.

In the weeks after this hurricane, we had disruptions, as I mentioned, and danger to both personal safety and properties. Simply reinforce—I want to simply reinforce how vital it is that we guarantee our public safety officials can always be assured that their communications will not be disrupted, especially during times of emergency.

Sheriff Dicus and Mr. Newton, how has the market for public services changed in the last 10 years?

Sheriff DICUS. So the market—going back to your point—and you might have a great point, OK, the website is not available. How do we know? One of the things we are doing in our county—and obviously, everybody has one of these cell phones for the most part now—is creating apps. We have Ready SB County as the app. So a lot of the predictive technologies that will happen in a fire, flood, mudslide—we had Snowmageddon similar to kind of what you are describing that we—in Southern California, of all places.

But the market going—it is kind of—we have talked about various medias here today. The market is really all the medias. And we are looking at things generationally also. Certain people ingest things differently than others. And if we don't take that into part of this conversation, then we are missing the point. Same thing with first responders. If we don't develop a robust broadband network, they are going to figure out how to do it on their own with this device here. So the market has changed significantly.

And then also you talk about let's go into the sky. In my county, I have the San Andreas Fault. I have two main dispatch centers for that purpose and that purpose alone in terms of engineering reports that have been done. If that fault goes, they are going to certainly separate. We are also looking at Starlink and looking at the sky so that we cannot just have our safety broadband network but augment it to where we can hit a satellite and still communicate voice over IP with the systems that we are talking about here today.

Mr. ALLEN. OK. Mr. Newton?

Mr. NEWTON. Thank you. A lot of the areas that I respond to, it just—these conditions, they change. What is working today may not necessarily be working tomorrow. We have—I believe in Yancey

County we have at least 13 A-frame sandwich boards in central parts of different communities. That is how we shared information for the first several weeks.

During Helene, we also were able to take advantage of low Earth orbit satellite systems. I think there is still an opportunity for the very small after—satellite systems to keep some of these other devices online. We would much rather have an actual cell site instead of a deployable, but our ability to work through that—and, in fact, many communities now, once the deployables were introduced by the carriers, we have now invested in our own. And we just coordinate with the carriers to make sure that we are not the cause of harmful interference.

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Newton, obviously, do you feel better about the options that we have today versus 10 years ago, and why did you choose FirstNet over another service?

Mr. NEWTON. So we choose—we actually have a diverse series of systems that we use. So we use the big three, you know: FirstNet, Verizon, and T-Mobile. Because, again, in my office, we can't fail. Everything always has to work.

What FirstNet has given us is that—that dedicated core specifically for public safety. The use of Band 14, which they were allocated, that allows, again, that dedicated to public safety activities. I know during Tropical Storm Chantal, I took advantage of it when I had to set off our WEA system. I was able to—in the midst of the storm, I was able to connect using my FirstNet device to the software that actually sets off our WEA system.

Mr. ALLEN. OK. Thank you very much.

Thank you to our witnesses. I have a few more questions I will submit for the record, and I appreciate your response on that.

And I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

I will now recognize the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Soto, for 5 minutes of your questions.

Mr. SOTO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And let me start with a thank you. I know we have a lot of law enforcement, firefighters, first responders in the room, including the sheriff. We appreciate all that you do to help protect us. And that is what this discussion is about today: saving lives and responding to emergencies, including natural disasters.

I represent central Florida. We have urban, suburban, and rural areas, so we have to respond to all different types of scenarios.

For years, this committee has had a lot of great bipartisan work on using spectrum auction funds. The FirstNet, which we heard from today about; Rip-and-replace, to help remove Chinese telecommunications equipment that is spying on Americans; and, of course, broadband on deployment.

But we have seen a departure from that lately with the deeply unpopular Big Ugly law, using that spectrum funding for the first time for billionaire tax cuts over public safety and disaster response. I know for Florida that is not a good deal for us. Add in mass firings at FEMA, cuts to next-generation warning systems through public broadcasting through the rescission package, as well as a rural broadband program that has been stalled for 8 months

ever since the President got elected. This partisanship has come at a really terrible time.

We see hurricanes getting more extreme due to climate change in Florida. We have 3 months to go. I know Mr. Wright knows what I am talking about there. And our farmers, they are being hammered right now: Trump's tariffs, rising input costs, and a shrinking farm workforce due to mass deportation. The least we can do is get them internet as quick as we can.

And then as far as public safety, we can reduce crime and enhance public safety by continuing to fund the COPS Program to support local law enforcement. When we see a cut requested by the President for the COPS Program, I think we need to stand strong in Congress to support our local law enforcement. And we could reauthorize FirstNet with potential improvements and reforms that we are here to talk about today, as well as Next Generation 9-1-1, including satellite, which I know Mr. Newton talked about, among other technologies.

Sheriff Dicus, thank you for being here. I know Mr. Aguilar would be pleased to know that you are here today, and I know Mr. Ruiz as well,

My first question, you had mentioned that Next Generation 9-1-1 gives you better situational awareness, so I wanted to give you an opportunity to elaborate. How does it give you better situational awareness?

Sheriff DICUS. I am so glad you asked that question. So when we talk about it—and I will just give you an example. We have an app called QuickCapture. We are fortunate to have Esri, the—GIS works for DoD and does a number of things using GIS technology. But I will give you an example of a fire.

When we go in, we give a warning. You generally have a law enforcement officer go through the same neighborhoods and say, "Hey, this be coming, get ready to go," that type of thing. We will have people that say whether they are going to go or refuse to go. We can immediately, with this application using GIS technology, which runs on a broadband network, to be able to say, "Shannon Dicus is not leaving." So now when it goes from a warning to mandatory, we know we can go directly back to him: "Look, it is imminent, the fire is going to hit, you have to leave now."

So that situational awareness of the public, also situational awareness of your deputies and law enforcement officers and fire personnel in the field. Then also, we remember, after-action reports are critically important so we do a better job next time. We can map every place a law enforcement officer or a firefighter was at to see if we hit the proper coverage areas, what communication systems are working and got us to those points.

So it is amazing the technology that is available to law enforcement and first responders now to really do that analysis and give folks like you feedback, to give you really what I call street view.

Mr. SOTO. Thank you, Sheriff.

Mr. Wright, welcome to Washington. You talked about the BEACON radio station and FPREN. How critical is public broadcasting to our rural areas around Alachua County, south Osceola, and Orange County?

We all know, when all else fails, the car radio is the last resort. I know that from personal experience. It would be great if you could discuss that a little bit.

Mr. WRIGHT. Sure. Well, thank you for your question.

You know, truly, the infrastructure that the American taxpayers and Congress has invested in for decades in the public broadcasting transmission system, that truly is our last mile. The discussions about enhanced 9-1-1 are great.

And this hits personally very close to home. My son-in-law is a Missouri State trooper in St. Louis. I sat on the Florida Highway Patrol Advisory Council. I understand how critically important that is that the public is able to communicate, our first responders are able to communicate. But once we get that information to our agencies, then they are alerting, and their advisory information has to get to the public in a very resilient environment. And that is what that public broadcasting infrastructure investment has been about for 50 to 60 years.

We need to maintain that investment to ensure that the citizens of Florida and South Carolina and Missouri and every other State in the country has easy, unfettered access to these critical alerts and advisories.

Mr. SOTO. Thanks. My time has expired.

Mr. HUDSON. I thank the gentleman.

I now recognize the gentleman from Ohio, Mr. Latta, for 5 minutes of his questions.

Mr. LATTA. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. And thanks for our witness for being with us today, and for holding this really important hearing.

I recently met with the Crawford County Sheriff's Department in my district where they demonstrated how they utilized FirstNet to ensure they have reliable communication and respond to emergencies. And as one of the Republicans and one of the early Members who was here that, when we created the FirstNet program, I must say, seeing first it deployed through my district and the Nation shows how this true public-private partnership has been tremendously successful.

Sheriff DICUS, if I could start with you. Congress created FirstNet to ensure that public safety has a seat at the table when the coverage decisions are made. And let me say, early on when we have had those initial hearings, there was a kind of a disconnect from Washington and thought it was going to impose its decisions and how I thought it was going to run and kind of forgot to talk to the folks at the local and State levels. And, fortunately, we saw a real change that came about from that.

But could you speak to the uniqueness this network offers for the public safety community when we talk about FirstNet?

Sheriff DICUS. Absolutely. First of all, you mentioned it, and I think this is where major county sheriffs becomes the best resource for all of you, and it is what I mentioned earlier in terms of street view, how are our troops out there on the streets actually interacting and what works the best and to have our opinions about these things. But when you talk about governance and the way that FirstNet is rolled out, for the first time, law enforcement and those professionals that are using that are part of those groups in

terms of the implementation across the country and certainly in our State and locally.

So it gives us a voice we haven't had before. But, more importantly, for all of you, allows you to hear how this affects us, what is going on in the streets, and how we use that technology to better service to the public.

Mr. LATTI. In your testimony, under your FirstNet infrastructure security, you got some areas in here that are kind of scary because we are talking about, you know, you responded to vandalism, sabotage, targeted acts of terrorism against towers and network nodes. And, you know, you are talking about wanting to make sure you have the resilience of the system, which requires both digital and physical security measures.

Could you talk about this? I know what you are talking about on the security side. What about on the digital side on how you protect it?

Sheriff DICUS. So it was mentioned—and we just kind of surface touched it—on the digital side related to cybersecurity, having almost DoD-type of audit processes for our system. We are talking about critical information, not just to service the public but also to different assets across the United States, critical infrastructure that we all work to protect.

It is almost the 10-year anniversary of what we call December 2. But the second-largest terrorist attack occurred in San Bernardino County. And in that area, at first when those things happen, you don't know. Is that the primary target? What is the purpose? So you start setting out to look at your critical infrastructure, the physical protection, and from a cybersecurity perspective being able to protect those. But it is really the audits and identifying the vulnerabilities leading up to that, both on the physical side and the technical side. And there is a lot of expertise here at the Federal Government level. If that could be shared with the locals, it would certainly enhance those security measures.

Mr. LATTI. Excellent. Mr. Newton, as you know, there is a sunset for the FirstNet program, and Congress will need to reauthorize it by the end of 2026. Is there any length of time you believe would be appropriate for reauthorization?

Mr. NEWTON. And I am sorry, could you repeat that?

Mr. LATTI. Yes, with the sunset for FirstNet program and Congress will need to reauthorize it by the end of 2026, do you believe there is any length of time that would be appropriate for the reauthorization for FirstNet?

Mr. NEWTON. Yes, overall it is a 20, 25-year project. I don't really have a clear opinion on it. I think what is important to me is the oversight, is the making sure we are meeting the goals that we set. I think it is establishing recovery—again, one of the themes I bring up frequently is recovery-time objectives. You know, making sure that those are being met, and especially with each new disaster, because they are not going to be fewer. But the next one that we see, let's revisit it. And how are we doing? What progress are we making? So, you know, I am not sure I can put a timeframe on that.

Mr. LATTI. OK. Let me just follow up in my last 33 seconds I have got here. You know, in your experience responding to disas-

ters, has the IPAWS system been effective for transmitting emergency alerts to impact the communities?

Mr. NEWTON. And I am sorry, that—

Mr. LATTA. In your experience responding to disasters, has the IPAWS system been effective for transmitting emergency alerts to impact the communities?

Mr. NEWTON. Yes. I think the technology is effective. I think that the things that we need to work on is our training, our ability to set the systems off, our reliance on it, and the public's response to a warning. Do they behave—do they actually do the response that we have asked them to, the protective action?

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

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentleman from California, Dr. Ruiz, for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. RUIZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As a physician and Member of Congress representing medically underserved rural southern California, I cannot overstate the importance of reliable broadband infrastructure for public health and safety.

In rural communities across the Coachella Valley and Imperial Valleys and in rural San Bernardino County, in my districts, access to emergency care and telehealth can mean the difference between life and death. Many residents, including working families, face barriers to care due to poor internet connectivity. These challenges are worsened by long travel distances, provider shortages, and the recently passed Republican Big Ugly Bill are going to make those worse. Nearly \$1 trillion to Medicaid cuts. Hospitals will close, meaning people are going to be more uninsured, needing more specialty care, increased chronic illness. They are going to have to travel longer distances. So it is like we took 10 giant steps back, and we are trying to make one tiny step forward with this hearing.

And broadband is no longer a luxury. It is essential infrastructure for the common good. Rural residents are at risk for not having good broadband, and not having connection is a risk for chronic illness.

In 2019, the FCC found that 17 percent of rural Americans lacked broadband versus only 1 percent of urban residents. The CDC also links poor internet access to higher rates of chronic conditions and worse health outcomes. Having broadband is a social determinant of health.

Broadband is vital for veterans, patients managing chronic diseases, remote monitoring, and seniors relying on remote specialists. It is also important for first responders to respond to emergencies.

Sheriff Dicus, from your perspective, how do unreliable broadband and outdated safety networks hinder law enforcement coordination during disasters?

Sheriff DICUS. I am sorry. Dr. Ruiz, a number of things that you said we use regularly. I think you have experienced where you actually have an emergency situation in the field, you are talking to the doctor at the emergency room before you even move the patient.

So those things are critically important, broadband across the rural areas, as you are requesting, but it is even something simpler as saving lives. So, unfortunately, we deal with a lot of school shootings and things with major county sheriffs and law enforcement really across the Nation. If you think about your ability to have that situational awareness, you are going after the threat, you are trying to stop the threat, but there are children that have been shot.

Being able to direct your medical emergency personnel into them saves lives. You can't just secure the area. You have got to move. It is a moving, actionable, ongoing event.

Mr. RUIZ. Let me ask you another question. Does Needles and Lake Havasu, the area in San Bernardino that I represent, use NG 9-1-1?

Sheriff DICUS. They are. They are transitioning, and that is a very unique area because of the borders involved, as you well know. And even on the lake we have multiple jurisdictions as a result of that. So, yes, we are using that technology.

Mr. RUIZ. Thank you. You know, because we need to modernize and expand our emergency communication systems, which is why I strongly support the NG, Next Generation, 9-1-1. Our 9-1-1 call centers must be able to receive real-time text, photos, and videos to enhance emergency response and protect both callers and first responders. But this only works if the digital backbone is strong.

In my district, we have already seen the consequences of aging infrastructure. Copper wire theft has disrupted 9-1-1 service, delaying emergency response and endangering lives.

According to the GAO, insufficient broadband infrastructure in rural areas contributes to slower response times as first responders cannot always access critical information in realtime. Slower response time in the emergency department means, if you are having a stroke, you are more likely to die or have permanent damage. Same thing with cardiac arrest or heart attacks.

Dr. Fontes, given your leadership at National Emergency Number Association, what should Congress do to retire old systems and equip public safety answering points, or PSAPs, for NG 9-1-1?

Dr. FONTES. Thank you for your question.

If I am looking at public safety writ large from the field responders to the public who calls 9-1-1, the weakest link in this whole chain is Next Generation 9-1-1. You talk about broadband capabilities that the public would have available to them and the ability to transmit information to 9-1-1. Well, if that 9-1-1 center is not Next Generation 9-1-1-capable or is voice-centric—in other words, rich information is removed—you lose valuable information—

Mr. RUIZ. Yes, sir.

Dr. FONTES [continuing]. Valuable time.

What Congress can do, and I have said this on multiple occasions—

Mr. RUIZ. You have 5 seconds.

Dr. FONTES [continuing]. Is to ensure funding for Next Generation 9-1-1.

Mr. RUIZ. Thank you. And with that, I yield back my time.

Mr. HUDSON. Well done. Thank you.

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

Mr. GRIFFITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

Mr. Newton, I know that your part of North Carolina is a little bit east of the part that I border, but my district is very mountainous, and I border a big chunk of North Carolina, from Henry County, which would be Martinsville area, all the way to where the Virginia-North Carolina line ends.

We weren't hit as hard, but we were hit by Helene. And, interestingly, in the areas most hard hit, all of my cell service went down. So I am out driving around the day afterwards and actually had an employee who I lost for several hours. The good news is we didn't have any water fatalities. We had two that were related to wind, but we didn't have any actual water fatalities in my district, but we had significant damage. And all the cell phone towers, for whatever reason, and it was—it turns out it was different reasons in different areas. Because I tried to find the common thread and couldn't.

So what can we do to harden our communication infrastructures so that we don't have that problem again? Because in Grayson County, they had one hot spot in downtown Independence, right on—and that is on the North Carolina border. In Damascus, we had to bring in low Earth orbit Starlink. There was a mobile unit available in Wise County that the health wagon brought over. And then later, FirstNet showed up, apparently, or in some kind of conjunction there, eventually.

But what can we do to harden our existing structure? And should we be looking at leapfrogging to go to low Earth orbit as a part—I know that FirstNet's looking at that. But what should we be doing? Because every locality has problems, particularly in western North Carolina and southwestern Virginia. They all have problems coming up with the funding. And low Earth orbit looks like it is a more affordable way to go than some of the others. What say you?

Mr. NEWTON. So I think—there is a couple of different approaches that are relevant here. I think there is the trying to prevent a site from going down, and then there is also trying to compress the time that that site is down if we do meet that threshold. So I think the—preventing the site from going down, you know, hardening measures at the sites, things to prevent vandalism. There is the things that cause our problems. They lose a link on a fiber link, so they don't have data or they lose power, and usually those are not independent of each other. Usually we have some combination of that.

So on the side of losing the connectivity, what we found—and this is, you know, as low Earth orbit satellite constellations are improved, this will likely change. But there is also a capacity issue with those. So we may balance it with a VSAT, which is slightly slower but a more dedicated carved-out line.

Mr. GRIFFITH. All right. For everybody back home, VSAT.

Mr. NEWTON. I am sorry. Very small aperture terminal.

Mr. GRIFFITH. OK.

Mr. NEWTON. That is a satellite service. It is in a geosynchronous orbit, slightly lower bandwidth, but it is still—it is a carved-out, dedicated pathway.

What we saw is, early on, our low Earth orbit satellite terminals, the Starlink, they provide us connectivity very quickly, very easy, easy to deploy. At some point you reach a capacity. So there is that side of it.

There is also—what we do in our State USC, many State USCs do, is that combination or that partnership with the carriers to bring them in to, How do we get your services back up? Where are the services down? What can we do to help those carriers get them back up?

And then the last thing I would leave you with would be the—when we had—western North Carolina, just like in West Virginia—the western portion of Virginia—are difficult areas to provide data services in. And so what tends to happen is we put all of our carriers on one fiber optic line. And so if that one line is hit by a tree, by a landslide, whatever it may be, then all the services on that fiber line go down.

Mr. GRIFFITH. Yes, and I don't know how you solve that because we got so many—it is mountainous, there is lots of little valleys and so forth. That is hard. I will say, as far as being able to respond quickly. In Caswell County, at least the first responders were able to get their radio system back up and running because somebody knew exactly what to do. They went to the tower and started the generator, which for whatever reason hadn't started itself, but one of their—one of their team knew that is where they needed to go and they got it taken care of fairly quickly in that county. But there were other places where it took days before we got everything back up and running. So I do appreciate that.

Looks like my time is out, and I appreciate all of you being here today. This is an important issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

I will now recognize the gentleman from California, Mr. Peters, for 5 minutes for your questions.

Mr. PETERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing.

And there has been a lot of agreement here. I don't want to go over a lot of ground that has already been tread. I think all of us in this committee really want to help our first responders make the best decisions and keep all of our respective communities safe across the country.

I would say, you know, we have suffered a couple setbacks in this effort on funding. One is we had an agreement that we would use spectrum auction proceeds to fund this, and that money went into the big bill. And so now the work we have done on this committee has taken a little bit of a hit.

I would say also, I got to say on rescissions that this is a really difficult thing for this body. You make a deal with the other side, and you go—you talk about things like public broadcasting and whether it should be publicly funded because it is broadcasting or whether it should be publicly funded because it helps you with emergency access. And we make a deal, we shake hands, the Presi-

dent signs it. And then you go back and you swipe out what you don't like. And it makes it really hard to continue to work, even on stuff that we agree on, when we do practices like that.

So I am hoping that my colleagues—appreciating you may not agree with that particular policy—will understand and maybe resist the temptation to do this anymore.

We have got to get back to working together. We have got to get back to understanding that this institution has an independent duty, the power of the purse. We all should stand up for it, even on the items—particular items we might not agree with. But when it is important to the whole agreement and the whole—ability of us to make progress and trust each other, trust is what it is all about in this room.

Sheriff DICUS, I want to ask you a particular question to build on some of this stuff that has happened. I took a ride-along with my local police department in San Diego. One thing I noticed was how primitive the technology was in the car to tell you where to go. And so what I saw—first of all, it is all by radio. It seems like each officer decides where he or she will go based on a screen that looks like it could have been from the '80s.

Will Next Generation 9-1-1 help—in the car help those officers get to the right place, maybe help response times, maybe prioritize calls in a way that we haven't been able to do with technology before?

Sheriff DICUS. The answer is, yes, sir, it will. You are looking at primitive technology, and a lot of it is causing us to replace computer automated dispatch systems and things of that nature. And you are running on legacy systems. So instead of using something modern like Apple CarPlay to be able to get from call to call, you are using an archaic system.

So you are absolutely right there. That is why you will see a lot of the officers, and I am sure you did on your ride-along, actually, go to technology like this.

So having that reliable broadband network—and what is going to drive that is the amount of data that a first responder can actually ingest now.

You have heard the concept real-time crime center? That is the data—that is the data reception center to be able to work on a broadband network and then transfer that back out to the field so that you have real-time operational data.

Mr. PETERS. How does the Federal Government participate in making sure that that technology is available and maybe standardized and maybe ultimately adopted?

Sheriff DICUS. Yes, I mentioned earlier policy and governance, giving some direct guidelines so that public safety can always be on the latest and greatest system, and also the funding sources. Unfortunately, any type of technological advancement you get you can almost count on, as a local agency, there is going to be a 5 percent uplift every year, and it just becomes cost prohibitive for both counties and local jurisdictions.

Mr. PETERS. Well, you know, we are from relatively large organizations in terms of sheriff and police. I mean, I imagine that for smaller outfits it is even more difficult. I mean, can the Federal Government assist with that?

Sheriff DICUS. So it is kind of interesting in terms of the implementation. I call it—in a county as big as your county and as big as mine, I call it the have and have-nots. Smaller jurisdictions, if the funding is available, can actually turn much quicker than the larger ones, because I have to make what works, as was mentioned out in Needles earlier, all the way to my very populated and urban areas.

So the small areas and small police departments, if they have the money, can usually turn on a dime and get this fairly quickly. So, again, making that funding available.

Mr. PETERS. Well, here in Congress I think we all appreciate the risk of bureaucracy in larger organizations. So thanks for bringing that up.

I would say FirstNet is up for reauthorization in 2027. I am glad we are starting meaningful conversations. I made my caveat about working together. I hope people take it seriously. And I hope we can make some improvements to improve the program for the benefit of our first responders who we all care about.

And with that, I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. I thank the gentleman.

I recognize the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Bilirakis, for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it very much. Thanks for holding this hearing.

During my district work period, I was able to tour the Citrus County emergency response center under the direction of Sheriff David Vincent and see firsthand how FirstNet is facilitating life-saving operations for my constituents but all over the State of Florida.

The sheriff highlighted how FirstNet has advanced—it has really enhanced officer safety and response time. Specifically, the increased connectivity has allowed his deputies to be able to upload body cam footage from within their vehicles as opposed to having to drive to a separate location to upload.

So, Mr. Newton, I have a question. From your experience, what can you say about response times and information sharing among emergency personnel pre- versus post-FirstNet implementation?

Mr. NEWTON. Thank you for the question. What we have seen primarily has been—historically, if we had a call for you, we would call you on a land mobile radio and tell you over voice this is where your call is, this is the address, these are the conditions that are occurring. And that is if everything worked fine and the weather is great and the radio transmission went through.

Now, that police officer, that sheriff's deputy, that paramedic, have a terminal in their car that oftentimes we don't even have to say the words. The call gets sent to them digitally. The information is there. The chance for us to give you an address incorrectly is taken off of the table. And then the rich content, if we had video, if we had files associated, if we have a history associated with an address, all of those things are then part of this ecosystem that this responder is now working in. And that is the most significant change that we have seen, that the rich data that they immediately have access to.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Thank you very much.

Next question. Every so often we hear about the 9-1-1 outages impacting communities. Just in July, a 9-1-1 outage affected six Florida counties, including Citrus and Pasco County, which I represent. Ultimately, in this instance, the outage was due to an inadvertently cut cable. However, it raises question about emergency operation redundancy and security.

So, Mr. Newton, again, what procedures do you have in place in the event of a 9-1-1 outage, and what are your recommendations for ensuring continuity of 9-1-1 services that would help prevent the frequency of these outages around the country?

Mr. NEWTON. The biggest threat to any 9-1-1 system is a backhoe. What we implement in 9-1-1 centers across North Carolina ideally is a disparate pathway. So it physically comes in at a different angle from a different street, if possible, for fiber lines or any of our backup lines. And in some cases, that is not. We discussed in western North Carolina sometimes you only have one path, or that last mile may be shared by, you know, two different carriers coming in, but then they share that last mile to your building, your physical structure, and that is at risk.

One of the projects that North Carolina is working on now is an AT&T FirstNet additional backhaul, where an additional AVPN, or AT&T Virtual Private Network, that is solely over FirstNet, it takes advantage of the security of the core of FirstNet, and it becomes a wireless—at least as immune to the backhoe—that will guarantee that we still have at least one more pathway into that 9-1-1 center to provide telephony, to provide data.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Thank you for that.

Dr. Fontes, looking forward to the future, we must. We have a number of hearings—we have had a number of hearings in this committee on AI. How do you envision AI being utilized to enhance emergency response in the future, and how can Congress help to make that the reality? Dr. Fontes, please.

Dr. FONTES. Thank you. Thank you for that question. I am a real strong believer in any new technology. AI is that.

I think in the 9-1-1 field right now, it is early, it is an early entrant. But looking into the future, to your question, I think AI can do a lot to enhance the information coming into the 9-1-1 center and ultimately distribute it to those who are the field responders. You can do simultaneous translations. You may be able to assess the situational awareness by factors that the human eye or the human ear cannot detect so easily. That would allow that 9-1-1 professional to perhaps follow up with more specific questions.

Being able to garner that information is critically important to make sure that our field responders are fully prepared for the situation that they are going to participate in.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Makes sense. I appreciate it very much.

And I yield back, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

The Chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Michigan, Mrs. Dingell, for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mrs. DINGELL. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Every day we see firsthand the critical need to modernize our emergency communications infrastructure. Whether it is upgrading 9-1-1 systems, expanding coverage for first responders, or ensur-

ing our weather alert systems are reliable, these investments directly impact public safety across the country.

Since I have been in Congress, I have fought for and secured funding to upgrade communications technology because our first responders deserve strong and resilient tools to protect our communities.

As cochair of the EMS Caucus, with Chair Hudson, I know how critical these issues are. Our first responders work around the clock under immense pressure, and the least we can do is to ensure they have reliable systems that help save lives. These upgrades are tangible. They include faster response times, uninterrupted 9-1-1 service during power outages, and lifesaving information delivered to our communities. And as the need grows, resources aren't keeping up.

I am going to join my other colleagues in expressing my concern that the spectrum auction proceeds from President Trump's One Big—I use different adjectives—Beautiful Bill are being diverted to pay for tax breaks rather than used for Next Generation 9-1-1 and other public safety. But having said that, let me start with local weather notification systems.

Last year, a tornado struck southeast Michigan without any advanced warning, resulting in the death of a 2-year-old boy. To put things in perspective, Michigan typically experiences about 13 to 15 tornadoes in an entire year. As of late August 2025, this year's total of tornadoes is 30. More than double the average.

In the summer, during another period of extreme severe weather, NOAA's All Hazards weather radios went completely offline, leaving parts of my district in the dark. These radios are essential to public safety, especially in our low-connectivity communities where internet and cellular-based alerts aren't reliable or available. And when they fail, lives are at risk, as all of you know.

Mr. Newton, the failure of the NOAA radios, coupled with the lack of a tornado warning last year, shows we need more than just a fix. We need redundancy and backup plans. What should we be doing to strengthen resiliency in our emergency alert systems to ensure they don't fail during life-threatening weather events?

Mr. NEWTON. Thank you for that question. I think, specifically for the National Weather Service warning—weather alert radios—again, it is ongoing. None of these projects are a one-time. They require continued sustained funding, whether it is upgrades, updates, maintenance, the technical expertise to do those repairs, all of those are absolutely essential.

I think also, we live in an ecosystem of warning and notification in alert systems. There is no one approach that successfully warns a public. Part of that is also the redundancy that we built in. What we really like about NOAA weather alert radios is the fact they make a lot of noise, and they will wake you up at 2 o'clock in the morning, especially for the unexpected incident that is occurring, but, you know, encouraging additional redundancies and defense in-depth with more than one way to receive a notification.

Mrs. DINGELL. Thank you.

Mr. Wright, we have heard reports of budget constraints and staffing shortages at NOAA, the National Weather Service, FEMA may be impacting the ability to upgrade systems and maintain op-

erations. How do budget cuts and staffing shortages impact coordination and reliability and the ability to respond quickly to emergencies?

Mr. WRIGHT. Well, they make an extraordinary impact across the entire spectrum. The scientists, the experts at the National Weather Service, the National Hurricane Center, throughout the NOAA culture, they are experts that provide us with this alerting information that then, flowing through the FEMA IPAWS system, goes to the public broadcasting infrastructure which exists across the entire country, and through the PBS WARN System, which is the redundant system for our wireless emergency alerts.

So these are really critical questions that we have to wrestle with today. But at the end of the day, part of a solution is innovation, utilizing the infrastructure that we have been investing in for years and years, and that is the public broadcasting infrastructure, that last mile.

Our BEACON project, which does incorporate artificial intelligence in the most responsible possible way, takes these alerts coming directly from the National Weather Service, the National Hurricane Center, county emergency agencies, and then translates those directly into a 24-hour always-on alerting channel on the most resilient medium, which is broadcast radio.

We have seen this time and time again in Florida and South Carolina, where during the worst of times, when these go down and you lose internet connectivity and you lose everything else that people think is their final, you know, word—no, no, no, it is broadcast radio, and it is the work that is happening through projects like FPREN and BEACON that are making the difference.

We have to be afraid—have to be—not be afraid of innovation and fully utilizing the infrastructure that exists today and investing in that.

Mrs. DINGELL. Thank you. I know I am out of time. I will yield back, Mr. Chair, but I have more questions for the record.

Mr. HUDSON. Well, we will be happy to have you submit those, and witnesses, I am sure, will be happy to respond.

I now recognize the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Carter, for your 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for holding this hearing. And thank all of you for being here.

Emergency communication is certainly important, and certainly important in my district. I have the honor and privilege of representing the entire coast of Georgia, over a hundred miles of pristine coastline. And, of course, we have a lot of hurricanes in our area, hurricanes as well as flooding. In fact, Hurricane Helene was one of the most devastating storms that we have ever had in south Georgia, and it certainly was a challenge to our emergency communication.

It tore through the home State, through my home State, of Georgia, and it wreaked havoc on cell towers and on fiber lines and many other resources that were needed to have efficient communication. And it went on up, as you know, Mr. Newton, into western North Carolina. And certainly the devastation up there was severe.

From your experience, Mr. Newton, managing hurricane responses, what communication tools do local emergency managers rely on most when cell towers and power infrastructure are damaged?

Mr. NEWTON. Thank you for that question. Usually, at that point—so our primary systems, our telephony, what we normally rely on is down, there is no one solution, but what it tends to be is a combination. So in the last—during Helene, it was a lot of deployables where—whether it is a satellite COLT, or a cell tower on a light truck, a COW, a Cell on Wheels, any combination of a whole fleet across different carriers that—to restore cell signals in a small area.

At the same time, our ability to pass information through a whole community approach, we are sharing—you know, the AM radio stations, PBS radio stations—we are sharing instant information, we are sharing where the shelters are, where water is. And that is—I would love to take credit for that, but they took information that we were broadcasting, as well as other sources, crafted it together, and they are a trusted local source, and they put that information out as well.

Amateur radio, AuxComm, has always been with us, has always been a tool for sharing information. And so we use that. I had never been a huge proponent for low Earth orbit satellite internet systems. I now own at least six because of that event.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. That is interesting. That is interesting.

Well, let me ask you something. What about communicating across jurisdictional lines? In the State of Georgia, we have 159 counties—a lot of counties, more than we really need—and each of them have their own emergency management system, or at least most of them do. What are the kind of challenges that you face when you are going across jurisdictional lines like that?

Mr. NEWTON. So across any jurisdictional lines, you have disparate radio systems that may be on a conventional UHF or a VHF versus a trunked radio system. In North Carolina, we enjoy a combined 700, 800 megahertz trunked radio system that is statewide. Statewide has links to Virginia, has links to South Carolina, has links to Georgia, and our ability to patch things in.

Within that, we dictate certain—as part of the statewide interoperability committee, we dictate certain interoperability channels and talk groups and frequencies that should be in any radio in that system. And so as long as I can see you and we have a radio program to the same system, we can find a way to communicate.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. Well, let me ask you this. What kind of improvements would you like to see after the experience that you had with Hurricane Helene and the experiences that you have had with other types of natural disasters? What kind of improvements do you think would help local governments the most?

Mr. NEWTON. Local governments, we had that period of time immediately after a disaster where we couldn't communicate using our traditional means. And there is that fog of not knowing exactly what is happening, not knowing what resource—we use a pool method. We generally don't send resources ahead of time until we know what is needed, and that local emergency manager calls it in

and says, “I need this, I need that.” So not having communications is really critical for us.

I think, again, hardening of the—especially in the high-density area cell sites, having a recovery time objective. Granted, an 8-day recovery of most of our cellular systems, you know, 20—or 80-some percent of it is nothing short of miraculous. It is not enough. We work in these environments. We are relying on these systems communicating. It is a national public safety broadband network. We needed it back up, like all the other carriers.

Mr. CARTER OF GEORGIA. Great. Well, again, this is extremely important. I thank all of you. Thank all of the witnesses for being here.

And thank you, again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing, and I yield back.

Mr. BILIRAKIS [presiding]. The gentleman yields back.

I will recognize Representative Kelly for her 5 minutes of questioning.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chair and Ranking Member Matsui, for holding this morning’s hearing. And thank you to all of our witnesses for participating.

The recent flooding in Illinois’ Second Congressional District, which I represent—which is Chicago, the suburbs, and central Illinois—has once again underscored how crucial it is for constituents to have reliable and timely access to public safety alerts during natural disasters. When cellular networks fail, as we have seen during major emergencies, alternative communication pathways become a lifeline for communities. Ensuring that all emergency systems, including 9–1–1 telecommunicators and public safety broadcast networks such as FirstNet, are fully modernized, resilient, and properly funded is essential to protecting lives and property.

Mr. Newton, as an emergency management director with decades of experience responding to major disasters, you have firsthand knowledge of how critical reliable communication systems are for an effective emergency response. During events like Hurricane Katrina, widespread outages of cellular networks hampered response efforts and endangered lives. Based on your experience, what improvements are the most urgent to ensure that FirstNet remains resilient and operational during prolonged power outages and physical damage?

Mr. NEWTON. Thank you for that question. I echo what I mentioned before. I believe, you know, hardening of certain facilities, you know, trying to prevent a single point of failure anywhere in the network. I think, you know, sustained funding to not only maintain the network but expand the network. I think the other challenge that we continue to face is coverage in rural areas and making sure that we continue to expand in those areas as well.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you. As you have heard—we all heard—that Chicago might get a visit from the National Guard. In light of these threats to militarize cities like Chicago, how much will such actions impact first responder communication systems and their ability to coordinate effectively during real crises? And what improvements are necessary to ensure our public safety communication networks can withstand and adapt to disruptions in such scenarios?

Mr. NEWTON. In my opinion, I think that it poses less a technical challenge for us. The capacity is there, the radios are there, the interoperability frequencies are there. I think it is a leadership challenge in making sure that we have these different groups and different organizations that are operating within the same communities and making sure that they are communicating.

I think the most dangerous thing that we would have would be two different organizations that are not communicating and create some encounter there. I think that that would be my biggest concern, is that, you know, regardless of the operations that are occurring, always talking.

Ms. KELLY. The Next Generation 9-1-1 Act is crucial for modernizing emergency communications to handle today's data-driven demands, yet many communities face barriers to its full deployment. Dr.—is it “Fonts”?

Dr. FONTES. Thank you. That is true.

Ms. KELLY. How would securing full funding for the Next Generation 9-1-1 system improve the ability of emergency services to receive and utilize critical data, including text, photos, videos, during emergency calls?

Dr. FONTES. Thank you for the question. And it is a simple question that is very complicated. The simple question is—the simple answer is funding. And funding is essential. There is no question about it. Communities, Tribal lands, rural areas may have challenges maintaining both the legacy system while they are transitioning to a Next Generation 9-1-1 system at cost.

So there is an opportunity here to move 9-1-1 into the 21st century. As I said earlier, 9-1-1 is the weakest link between the public in their broadband capabilities and public safety responders with their broadband capabilities. 9-1-1—if in the Next Generation 9-1-1 environment were to actually happen, the information-rich associations with those calls coming in will benefit the public, will benefit the ability of the field responders to respond appropriately for the emergency register. Funding is the key issue.

Ms. KELLY. Thank so much. And it is an issue. You know, I have the city of Chicago, I have 4,500 farms in my district too, in central Illinois, very rural areas. So it is so very important.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. The gentlelady yields back.

I now recognize my good friend from the great State of Texas, Mr. Pfluger, for his 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. PFLUGER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I applaud the committee for having this hearing. It is obviously very important, and I think a bipartisan issue that—we have talked so much today—obviously, over the summer, we went through a very tragic time and in a place, in a location, geographically speaking, that is very hard at times to get connected and to send alerts. And so my mind has been there all summer on, you know, what it means to alert people. And I think this is exactly the type of work this committee should be proud of doing in a bipartisan way.

I will start with FirstNet. I have recently been connected to FirstNet after the events happened, the flooding happened this summer, and wanted—I think it is a good example of a public-private partnership and wanted to dig in a little bit. Some of these

questions we have kind of danced around. So they are going to be similar. But, Sheriff, I will start with you.

I know that there have been concerns expressed about how to improve the oversight and the transparency of FirstNet and the network. But I want to hear your experiences with FirstNet and either challenges with signal strength or the system in general, or the positive issues that you have seen from FirstNet.

Sheriff DICUS. Thank you for that question.

Most of what we have seen is positive. The reality in a county as large as mine is really the buildout. And it is also a communications—in your case in Texas, the communications before the event happened, staging things that the locals may need, and a lot of what I see is we are driving down—in law enforcement, we call this the mutual aid process. A lot of times—and I will say it maybe sometimes be, like, a political perspective, but it is being driven down. That process works up. We call and ask for those. We stage assets both federally, State, and locally, to be able to respond in the event the weather changes.

So when we are talking about a broadband network, we are talking about including AI, predictive technologies that can run you through scenarios for the staging of that equipment and prepare the first responders to be much quicker in an event like you experienced is something we need. And FirstNet carries that through. We just need more of it so we can guarantee that connectivity.

Mr. PFLUGER. Thank you for that.

And, Mr. Newton, I will go to you and just refer back to Hurricane Helene and the experiences that you saw there from the wireless emergency alerts—or excuse me—from FirstNet—not—I am getting ahead of myself, but from FirstNet on Hurricane Helene.

Mr. NEWTON. We saw, first and foremost, that the partnerships at the State level of coordinating where we are responding—or deploying equipment to where is the need, and then throughout the event, as the event evolved, our ability to move equipment around and make things work. Again, it was a catastrophic disaster for us. Tremendous damage. Never seen this much, from a technical side, the type of damage that we saw to fiber optic lines and to power systems—our ability to power cell sites.

But the close partnerships there and the fact that we have several agencies that have their own deployables—and so I am able just to set up my own FirstNet temporary compact rapid deployable. And I think—the challenge I think we will see in the near future is, as that becomes more prolific, we still have to coordinate that with the carrier. We want to make sure that we are not creating the interference.

Mr. PFLUGER. Well, that brings up a good—just kind of a good point. I mean, sometimes we can't stage. Sometimes we can't predict, you know. In the case of the floods that happened in my district and in Kerrville. I mean, that highlights maybe the need for secondary options and the challenges of getting into those rural places, which, whether it is Hurricane Helene or it is in the hill country of Texas or other places, sometimes you can't actually physically get there. So, you know, I want to hear your thoughts on low Earth orbit direct-to-device options that could be helpful in those cases.

Mr. NEWTON. So one of my staff members deployed to Helene the day after impact. And his task was to bring back connectivity to PSAPs. And I believe—I don't know if it was his first or his thirteenth PSAP that he arrived at, the person greeted him at the door and said, "I don't know what an angel looks like, but I believe it is you." And his role was to bring connectivity to a communication center who had been in the dark from the time of impact.

And so, in fact, what he deployed was a low Earth orbit satellite system, a Starlink system that provided WiFi and that gave you WiFi calling, and that center was then reconnected both with the public and your families who didn't know—those telecommunicators—how they fared.

Mr. PFLUGER. Well, thank you for that.

Again, I applaud the committee for the work on reauthorizing and getting FirstNet, you know, moving in a positive direction but also some other options.

And I think my time has expired. So I yield back.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Representative Menendez for his 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today, especially those who are representing the public safety community. We appreciate your dedication to keeping all Americans safe.

Mr. Chairman, we have heard a lot of talk about strengthening public safety infrastructure from our colleagues on the other side of the aisle today. But the Trump administration and congressional Republicans have consistently weakened our emergency management systems, endangering the lives of Americans and first responders, and making us less prepared when disasters strike.

It is not lost on me that we are holding this hearing on the same week as the September 11th terrorist attacks, an anniversary that is particularly salient in my district, which was home to many of the first responders who answered the call of duty that day—and to me personally. I was there across the river in Hoboken and later served as a commissioner of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. And so it is my belief that we need to do everything possible to keep our first responders safe, to give them the best equipment and technology that we possibly can, something that I will do so long as I get to serve in this role.

September 11th also revealed fundamental issues with our Nation's public safety communications. And, while we have improved our emergency preparedness, Republicans and President Trump are heading us in the wrong direction. Republicans have cut funding for public broadcasting, hindered the Next Generation Warning System, and left Next Generation 9-1-1 without a dedicated source of funding. At the same time, the Trump administration has gutted emergency preparedness funding, including FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program, that supported hazard mitigation projects in Hoboken, Bayonne, Newark—all municipalities I have the privilege of representing.

It is extremely frustrating and disappointing that we find ourselves here with all the work and progress that we have made.

I would like to start my questioning with the importance of Next Generation 9–1–1. New Jersey has experienced 75 natural disasters, costing over \$1 billion over the last 40 years. As a New Jerseyan who lived through Superstorm Sandy, I know how critical it is that we have effective emergency communications infrastructure.

Sheriff, just a yes or no. Is upgrading our Nation’s emergency communications systems a lifesaving necessity?

Sheriff DICUS. Yes, sir.

Mr. MENENDEZ. And Sheriff, how critical is upgrading our Next Generation 9–1–1 systems for the cybersecurity and resiliency of our Nation’s emergency communications networks?

Sheriff DICUS. Critical.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Thank you.

Dr. Fontes, you responded earlier to a question for Ranking Member Pallone that there isn’t currently a clear pathway to fund Next Generation 9–1–1 through spectrum auction proceeds. So just a yes or no. Sitting here today, would you feel more confident about the future of Next Generation 9–1–1 if Republicans had not walked away from a bipartisan agreement to fund it through spectrum auctions?

Dr. FONTES. Yes, sir.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Thank you.

I am incredibly concerned that Republicans have abandoned this bipartisan agreement that would have used funding from the FCC spectrum auction authority to fund Next Generation 9–1–1, making our public safety networks less secure and less resilient from cyber attacks. And all this is happening in the context of the Trump administration’s cuts to critical cybersecurity initiatives for telecommunications networks at CISA and other agencies.

Mr. Newton, Sheriff, does the Federal Government have an essential role to play with respect to ensuring that we have the cybersecurity capabilities to protect our emergency communication systems? Yes or no?

Sheriff DICUS. Yes.

Mr. NEWTON. Yes, sir.

Mr. MENENDEZ. And should we not be doing more to collaborate with our local agencies who are on the front lines to give you all the resources to ensure that as we improve our communication systems that they are cybersecurity resilient? Yes or no?

Mr. NEWTON. Yes, sir.

Sheriff DICUS. Yes, sir.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Thank you.

Mr. Wright, congressional Republicans recently rescinded funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, ending its role administering the Next Generation Warning System program that helps local communities receive emergency alerts during natural disasters.

Mr. Wright, is funding for the Next Generation Warning System crucial for our Nation’s public safety infrastructure?

Mr. WRIGHT. Lifesaving.

Mr. MENENDEZ. And how have cuts to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting from the Republican rescissions package affected funding for the Next Generation Warning System?

Mr. WRIGHT. Profoundly. Congress, in its wisdom, since fiscal year 2022 has appropriated \$176 million to the Next Generation Warning System.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Thank you—

Mr. WRIGHT. Right now, we have \$100 million that is in limbo. That money can be put to good use.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Understood.

Mr. Wright, just yes or no. Following the shutdown of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, should FEMA take over administering grants for the Next Generation Warning System?

Mr. WRIGHT. Yes, I believe it should.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Thank you. That is why I cowrote a letter with my colleague Congresswoman Barragán demanding that the Acting Administration—Administrator of FEMA take action.

But, in closing, this shouldn't be a Republican issue. It shouldn't be a Democratic issue. This shouldn't even be a bipartisan issue. This should be nonpartisan. We are finding ourselves in times where this administration and my colleagues across the aisle are being complicit in making us weaker and less secure. We should be doing the exact opposite.

Thank you all so much for being here, for all the work that you do.

Mr. HUDSON [presiding]. I thank the gentleman.

I now recognize the gentlelady from Indiana, Ms. Houchin, for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Mrs. HOUCHIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Matsui. Thanks to you, to the witnesses for being here today and for your testimony.

Last month I met with first responders in Ripley County, Indiana. I saw firsthand the importance of reliable public safety communications with FirstNet. I also represent a district that has had its share of natural disasters, and I know the importance of needing to have clear communication systems throughout. It was great to see them share information on how quickly and effectively resources can be deployed and information can be exchanged with first responders to keep the public safe.

In rural districts like mine, there are areas of the district that are still what I would consider dead spots in terms of communication services with traditional cellular service. So FirstNet does provide that additional access for our first responders in our less-than-covered areas.

But communication, as many of you have mentioned, is more than convenient. It can be lifesaving. Today's hearing reminds us that success requires Federal, State, and local partners all rowing in the same direction. In a crisis, no single system can carry the load. True resilience comes from interoperability, making sure radio, cellular, satellite, and Next Generation 9-1-1 systems can connect seamlessly so first responders can communicate and share information in real time.

To the panel, could you speak about the importance of interoperability in public safety communications? What steps should we consider to make sure these systems do work seamlessly across jurisdictions and in our technologies? Start with Mr. Newton.

Mr. NEWTON. Thank you. I think, first and foremost, the continued funding for the statewide interoperability coordinators that are located in each State, those individuals really guide the process of—you know, the technology may be there, but then where are the processes? What are the policies and plans?

Mrs. HOUCHIN. Sheriff?

Sheriff DICUS. Communication and technology is what we are focused on, obviously, today. But it is also the interoperability and knowing who your partners are across those lines prior to settling some of these governance decisions as it relates to technology. But, more importantly, knowing each other before the incident happens and you are shaking hands for the first time in the street.

Mrs. HOUCHIN. Thank you.

Dr. FONTES. Interoperability, it is essential it be a key component to Next Generation 9-1-1. Currently, if I am typing in or entering data into a CAD system and I have to transfer that to another 9-1-1 center, the 9-1-1 center may have to reenter all of that information. In the Next Generation 9-1-1 environment, you will be able to push that data and information out to as many PSAPs would be appropriate for the response of the emergency.

Mrs. HOUCHIN. Thank you.

Mr. WRIGHT. You know, I have learned a lot working with public safety agencies and emergency managers in Florida and South Carolina the last 10 years. Not coming from emergency management, I have learned a great deal about how critically important this interoperability is. For them to have access to that information is critically important. They can then make the proper decisions regarding alerting and advising the public. That is where the public broadcasting infrastructure comes into play, that final mile. And that is why supporting that infrastructure is so critically important for the future.

Mrs. HOUCHIN. I guess a followup question for you, Mr. Wright, would be what—what part, if any, does AM radio play in that overall discussion?

Mr. WRIGHT. It plays a huge part. You know, it is interesting. Growing up in the Midwest, as a child, I remember at night listening to stations like WLS out of Chicago and KAAY. Well, that AM technology, you know, what is old is new again when it comes to public safety. It is the most resilient infrastructure that we have. It is critically important. The AM Act—critically important for passage to support public safety.

Mrs. HOUCHIN. And, in rural areas, fiber lines and towers are vulnerable to natural disasters, leaving communities cut off at the exact time that it could be needed most. Mr. Newton, how do you see satellite technology shaping the future of public safety communications?

Mr. NEWTON. I see satellite technology in two respects, one being an exigent temporary solution to spot problems that we have at issue here at this one location, that we use as a temporary solution. It is also a hardening and redundancy feature of some of these sites, especially in our most remote sites. Some of these—in fact, one tower, it was 6 miles of debris to get to a tower. It is not practical to get to that during a disaster.

Mrs. HOUCHIN. Thank you again for our witnesses and for your testimony. This hearing underscores how vital it is that our first responders have communications they can rely on, whether it is in rural counties in Indiana or urban centers across the country. Lives depend on these systems, and the systems must be resilient, interoperable, and secure.

I look forward to continuing the work on this issue, and I thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentleman from Ohio, Mr. Landsman, for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANDSMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you all for being here.

I want to talk about, sort of, the infrastructure that we need to invest in. And so I am just—I am curious what you all would say, moving forward, has to be our top priorities. Obviously, I want to get your thoughts on the public broadcasting piece and what should happen; moving forward, what you think needs to—this Congress needs to do.

And it is not a leading question. I am curious as to what the answer is. What could some of the bipartisan solutions be? And then whether it is Next Gen 9-1-1 or the other pieces, what are—if you were to make a list of the things that the United States Congress should be investing in, collectively, so that the system has what it needs, the next iteration, the next generation, so that we are keeping everybody safe?

I am from Cincinnati. I represent both Hamilton County and Warren County in southwest Ohio and was at City Hall for a long time. And so I am deeply familiar with the importance of our emergency communication centers and what happens when things don't work out the way they are supposed to. Lives are lost, and it decimates a community.

And so, obviously, we want to constantly be getting better, from how quickly we pick up the call to how quickly we get a first responder out there, and, in the case of a mass event, how quickly we do everything.

So I am going to stop and just ask—and starting with Mr. Wright, can you talk a little bit about the public broadcast—you have a lot, but if you had to pick, you know, your top two or three things that Congress should do moving forward, what would those be? And then what are the other capacity investments that need to be made?

Mr. WRIGHT. You know, I—thank you for your question.

I think the first thing is to wrestle back control of the Next Generation Warning System grant money. That is truly a bipartisan solution that for the last 3 to 4 years Congress has fully funded. And so we would hope that the funding would continue for that. But then move to deploy those funds into our public broadcasting infrastructure as quickly as possible.

Mr. LANDSMAN. Yes.

Mr. WRIGHT. We have recently heard that a public broadcaster in Fairbanks, Alaska, now turns their transmitter off overnight from midnight to 6 a.m.—

Mr. LANDSMAN. To save money?

Mr. WRIGHT. To save money. And that is rescission related. But there are also issues related to the Next Generation Warning System for infrastructure support, and I can speak to it personally. We just put through an STA with the FCC to operate our full-power television transmitter at half power because it is out of date. It is old. We can't get parts for it any longer. We have two grant proposals in the NGWS warning system proposal system, and they remain unacted on.

Mr. LANDSMAN. OK.

Mr. WRIGHT. So move on NGWS.

Mr. LANDSMAN. Thank you. And I am going to follow up. My team will send a note, a letter, you know, just to get the ball rolling and see if there are other members of this committee that want to work with us. I suspect there will be, because I do think this is bipartisan.

Yes?

Dr. FONTES. Very simple. Fund Next Generation 9-1-1.

Mr. LANDSMAN. Yes.

Dr. FONTES. When we are talking about our overall public safety service at large, and particularly where there is Federal involvement in funding, ensure that the authorities that are responsible for that are operating correctly functionally so that we know that the money that is available is being spent wisely and deploying the systems needed.

Mr. LANDSMAN. Can you just say a word or two about that? I mean, is that just basic oversight, or is there something specific—

Dr. FONTES. Yes, yes, yes, I think it is basic oversight in large part. It is just the fact that, in the case of Next Generation 9-1-1, there is no 9-1-1 office anymore at the Federal level.

Mr. LANDSMAN. I got you. OK. That is good to know. Thank you.

Sheriff DICUS. My comments are along the same line. Still continue to build out with FirstNet. Anything that is priority-specific for public safety is something we need to expand upon so we don't have those commercial interruptions with other networks. And to make sure—the governance issue that we are all talking—a lot of you are frustrated about, you know, partisan issues and things of that nature.

But remember, when the Twin Towers fell, as it relates to law enforcement, we weren't talking to our Federal, local, and State partners. We all could have been part of the solution. We need to make sure that that continues as well so that we solve these problems and that everybody understands this isn't a red or blue issue. It is really a commonsense issue for all of the Americans across the board.

Mr. LANDSMAN. Yes, well said.

Mr. Newton, 10 seconds. Sorry.

Mr. NEWTON. Ten seconds. Ongoing funding for especially our land mobile radio systems. The challenge we have—it upgrades, updates, maintenance, deferred maintenance. Those are ongoing, constant challenges, and we are not away from those yet. FirstNet is an adjunct to that.

Mr. LANDSMAN. Thank you all.

I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Excellent questions, Mr. Landsman.

I now recognize the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Goldman, for your 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much to the entire panel for being here today. When it comes down to our end of the dais, I apologize if some of the questions have been asked, for I did have to step out and take a call. So, if I am repetitive in my questions, I apologize. But, again, thank you very much for being here.

I will start with both you, Mr. Newton, and Sheriff. My staff recently toured a facility where FirstNet portable cell towers and other network assets are stored and maintained in Texas. Can you speak to whether your agencies have used portable cell towers during emergency response or disaster planning and how they help enhance and address communications during these events?

Mr. Newton, if you would like to start.

Mr. NEWTON. As a matter of fact, we—my organization owns one. We deployed it 2 days ago, and it is in use right now during a search in a particularly rural area where we have a large temporary concentration of a lot of public safety. So we absolutely see the value in it and whether it is a—an emergency or a disaster.

Mr. GOLDMAN. All right. Thank you.

Sheriff?

Sheriff DICUS. The answer for me is also yes. We mentioned a lot of—looking at a cell tower as being critical infrastructure and when they go down, whether it is vandalism, man-made, or natural disaster, these portable units we can bring in and still—can continue to communicate.

And, also, when you talk about density of communication, putting those at our command centers that allows that traffic to be leveled out is really critical to things going on and things that we are responding to, almost daily.

Mr. GOLDMAN. All right. Thank you very much.

Dr. Fontes, how critical is the strong broadband connection utilizing the fullest extent of Next Generation 9-1-1 systems?

Dr. FONTES. Well, unfortunately, Next Generation 9-1-1 systems don't exist nationwide. There are States that are in various stages of deployment of Next Generation 9-1-1 systems. Many have deployed what we call ESI nets, or emergency service internet protocol networks, that allow for the movement of information. But Next Generation 9-1-1 is so much more than that. Therefore, the information coming in from the public or sensors or anything that would come into 9-1-1 is in large part—if there is any data or information associated with that—would be dummied down in large part for voice communication.

Now, there are situations where some centers are capable of receiving data that would enable our field responders to respond more effectively. It is imperative—imperative—that we have Next Generation 9-1-1 deployed so that the broadband capability from the consumer, the person dialing 9-1-1, goes to a broadband Next Generation 9-1-1 system into an IP base broadband public safety communications network.

We have to make sure that all the links in the full chain of command of public safety are current in technology. Thank you.

Mr. GOLDMAN. All right. Thank you very much.

And my final question—I will go back to you, Sheriff. My district is home to both large urban areas and rural communities. You noted in your testimony that smaller agencies often rely on larger counties for emergency communication infrastructure. What Federal steps would help ensure that Next Generation 9–1–1 deployment doesn't leave behind rural areas?

Sheriff DICUS. So it is twofold. Obviously, we have talked about funding the majority of the morning, but also having Federal-level cybersecurity audits and practices that are really DoD level, in my mind, to be able to protect those small agencies that can't afford it. In other words, if they are riding on a sheriff's backbone in some of those agencies, that we make sure that backbone is continually secured to the latest and greatest standards.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Thank you all again. That is the end of my questioning.

Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I appreciate the time. I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentlelady from Virginia, Ms. McClellan, for 5 minutes for your questions.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss our Nation's critical public safety communications networks at a time when natural disasters and public emergencies are becoming more commonplace.

And, as we have heard, communities rely on these systems not only in moments of crisis but for the trust and confidence that come from knowing that help is on the way. And, as we confront more school shootings, hurricanes, and other emergencies, ensuring that our first responders have reliable, interoperable, and modern communication tools isn't a luxury, it is a necessity. And it is critically important that no community gets left behind in the transition to these tools. It could be the difference between life and death.

And yet the latest data available shows that many communities, particularly rural ones, are in fact left behind today. In only seven States or territories have all PSAPs fully transitioned to Next Gen 9–1–1. Four States and territories remain in the legacy stage, meaning no PSAP has transitioned. And many of these legacy systems still rely on copper, which is over a century old. The rest of the States and territories are in various states of transition.

So for each of the witnesses—and I think I know the answer—do you think Congress should prioritize ensuring that all roughly 5,700 primary and secondary public safety answering points should transition to Next Generation 9–1–1?

Mr. NEWTON. Yes.

Sheriff DICUS. Yes.

Dr. FONTES. Yes, absolutely.

Mr. WRIGHT. Yes.

And I would also add very quickly that the University of Florida has been proactive in terms of creating products that address the very issue you were talking about with rural and underserved areas. We have deployed a new BEACON alerting channel that is

dedicated to four rural counties, and it is proving to be very successful.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. Good. Thank you.

And this hearing has made clear that funding is the primary challenge for PSAPs making this transition. I think it is important to level set because it is not in the record yet that local governments are the ones that primarily own and operate these PSAPs and pay for their establishment, their operation, their maintenance, and their transition, primarily through general funds and, in many cases, local or State-imposed surcharges. And, unfortunately, our localities, as we have heard, just don't have the funding to make these upgrades.

This year, the House majority had several chances to stand with rural communities and improve our communications infrastructure, but they didn't. They could have used spectrum auction proceeds to fund Next Gen 9-1-1, but they didn't. They could have pushed back on the administration's delays in broadband deployment, which is necessary to close the digital divide so that more people can see the benefits of Next Gen 9-1-1, but they didn't. They could have opposed cuts to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which administers the Next Generation Warning System grant programs, but they didn't.

For all of the witnesses, do you agree that these issues are all interconnected and that, without them, rural communities will be left behind?

Mr. NEWTON. Yes.

Sheriff DICUS. Yes. We are talking about a number of things here this morning, but even legacy systems remaining, modernizing a number of things, and it really is an all-in approach.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. Yes.

Dr. FONTES. Yes.

Mr. WRIGHT. Yes.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. And, while Congress last estimated that the cost to transition all PSAPs to Next Gen 9-1-1 in 2018, I think we all agree that the costs have likely gone up in the last 7 years, at a minimum through inflation and the cost of labor. But tariffs are also having an impact on the cost as they—and raising supply chain issues for copper, for those PSAPs that are still on legacy systems, for fiber optic components, PVCs, and other installation materials.

And I don't have enough time, maybe, for a full answer, but Sheriff Dicus, I want to elaborate a little bit. You touched on the critical role that Next Gen 9-1-1 could play in response to school shootings. Can you elaborate a little more specifically on how important it is to save lives in that situation?

Sheriff DICUS. Sure. So what I am talking to is primarily intelligence, both things that are going on at the school prior to the event even happening, and when you are talking about a real-time crime center or some of these technological advances we are talking about, is being able to feed that first responder what is the picture they are dealing with, what was before, who showed up, and what is going on.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. And, specifically, they need to see video.

Sheriff DICUS. Video certainly helps. And sometimes it is the video that the 9–1–1 dispatcher is receiving or a real-time crime center that is being translated what is being seen to the person that is trying to drive to get there.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. But it is more than just a voice on the phone explaining what is happening.

Sheriff DICUS. Yes, absolutely. We live in a modern age where pictures, video, and a number of things we are all operating on—frankly, used to operating on with our cell phones, and first responders are no different. The more information, the better.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Dunn, for your 5 minutes of questions.

Mr. DUNN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the first responders who volunteered your time to be here with us today. Your service is greatly appreciated.

This is the first in a series of hearings we will be doing on emergency communications this year. Programs like the First Responder Network, FirstNet, and Next Gen 9–1–1 are essential in Florida.

My district, Florida's Second Congressional District, makes up most of the panhandle, and we are no strangers to preparing and responding to natural disasters. Additionally, my district is home to some of the most frequented beaches, which requires emergency responders to lead in protocols, preparation, response, resources, for all kinds of emergencies.

In 2018, Hurricane Michael made landfall in my district as a cat 5, and it destroyed everything in its path, and we are still rebuilding 7 years later.

And then we had Hurricanes Ian, Idalia, and most recently Helene. All made landfall in our district. So the unfortunate truth is that, you know, our—during Hurricane Michael, our sheriff's department—everybody in our county—everybody in 12 counties lost all communications. Cell phones, land lines, even police repeaters went down.

So the Bay County Sheriff's Office had to make a critical decision to switch to FirstNet right after the storm, and fortunately they were connected almost immediately. However, witnesses here have mentioned that different areas have different coverage capabilities, and interoperability is still very essential.

So, while some sheriff's offices are using FirstNet or AT&T, others are using Verizon, other carriers. On the other hand, the Next Gen 9–1–1 program has helped streamline our tech advantages for our call centers. And thanks to these programs, as we have talked about, we have had—now we have video and text capability—not just text but video capabilities as well.

Sheriff Dicus, you recounted that, as a result of California's opt-in to FirstNet, San Bernardino received five new FirstNet tower sites. We have had similar accounts in Florida. As we look at reauthorizing the FirstNet program, can you explain your thoughts on the importance of the creation of FirstNet after the 9/11 terrorist attacks? And do you believe that the program was a necessary catalyst for building the emergency networks around the country?

Sheriff DICUS. So I will work your question backward, but absolutely. When we talk about interoperability—and it is an opportunity to build out—no matter the buildout that we have already discussed, where FirstNet is at this point, there's still vulnerabilities, and there's still gaps. We have a voice at the table. And where do we start filling in those gaps to be able to take care of the public?

Mr. DUNN. Can you enumerate a few of those gaps?

Sheriff DICUS. Sure. In my area, some of these things—even Federal land—Mount Baldy is a popular hiking area. And, as part of FirstNet, we were actually able to get a cell tower there for all the hikers that are coming from the Los Angeles space and being able to use that cell tower for emergency purposes. And, as the sheriff, I am mandated to do search and rescue responsibilities in the State of California. So that is the only way in which I can get to them rather than using the traditional ground-pounders where somebody realized somebody didn't return home. It is more immediate.

Mr. DUNN. I have to tell you, the sheriffs were—in my district area—I have 16 of them. They are outstanding.

Sir, as a user of FirstNet, have you had interactions or conversations regarding the program or oversight of the programs from anyone from NTIA, National Telecommunications and Information Administration, that oversees this program? And what from these conversations are you at liberty to share for our purposes as a fact-finding oversight organization?

Sheriff DICUS. That is for me or—

Mr. DUNN. Yes, for you, Sheriff.

Sheriff DICUS. So, in terms of my staff that works with those folks as they roll this out and the governing agencies, we have had nothing but positive contacts other than there is so much more needed to be able to fill the gaps that we talked about earlier.

Mr. DUNN. So we would love to help you fill those gaps. Please communicate with us.

I have a number of other questions for other members of the panel, and obviously my time is expiring. But this is a fascinating discussion. It is important. And it is certainly close to our hearts in Florida, where we experience a lot of natural disasters.

Thank you, gentlemen, all for attending today. Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentlelady from Florida, Ms. Castor, for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Ms. CASTOR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for calling this hearing. And thank you to all of the witnesses and all of the first responders who are there every single day to keep us safe, safe and well.

And, for Mr. Wright, I am sorry that—I have learned a lot about your commitment to the Florida Public Radio Emergency Network and BEACON. But I have also learned today before we came into the hearing room that you are the voice of Florida Gator football. You are the PA announcer. And I am really sorry that Congressman Bilirakis and Congresswoman Cammack are not here to hear me say, "Go Bulls," because that was an extraordinary event. I am

sure there was some emergency Gator signal sent up for that loss on Saturday.

Mr. WRIGHT. I clearly understood earlier how to turn my mic on and off. But I—but thank you, Congresswoman. I appreciate your sentiment.

Ms. CASTOR. Yes.

But here we are. We are about to come into the 1-year anniversary of Hurricanes Helene and Milton. And, in my neck of the woods in the Tampa Bay area, that was the worst catastrophe we have experienced in anyone's memory. During that time, after Helene, 1.3 million people lost power, and then Milton was right on its heels where over 3.4 million Floridians lost power. And it is giving me some flashbacks because what—what happened also was we couldn't get oil tankers in. So there was no fuel. We had police guarding gas stations. So people didn't have power, they didn't have gas, they didn't have internet. So what they relied on is just what you said: the over—over-the-air broadcast radio.

And I remember very well digging out my old Walkman with batteries, and I could listen to all of the updates: the bridges that were open, the ones that were closed, food distribution. And that helped me as a public servant to get that important information out to my neighbors.

So I am so grateful for what has happened over time in building that network. It is not easy. But it really is a model. It can't—you know, your phone—you are not going to be able to charge your phone in a catastrophe like that. So the satellite networks are important. Everyone has said we need redundant systems. But I found, in the immediate aftermath of a catastrophe, with no power and no internet, it is the public radio network.

So what are the lessons for other communities? Because you have worked with our Florida Department of Emergency Management for years to develop that network. What are the—what are the lessons learned that you can share with the rest of the country on building those networks out?

Mr. WRIGHT. Well, I think, you know, one of the best lessons that we have learned in Florida is that we are better together than we are separate. And what I mean by that is that we have an infrastructure in place through the broadcast infrastructure with public stations around the entire Nation. And so the Florida model that we have deployed into South Carolina as well through our partnership with South Carolina ETV and public radio, same exact model. Very efficient. In fact, one of the recognitions that I am most proud of is a Florida TaxWatch award for productivity and efficiency—

Ms. CASTOR. Wait. They are a very, very, very conservative group in Florida.

Mr. WRIGHT. I appreciate you recognizing that. That is why that award is center in my office, because it speaks volumes about the work that we are doing and the importance of that work.

And I think that we are uniquely positioned at this moment in time to take advantage of that infrastructure, to reinvest in it, to ensure that when the next hurricane comes in or the next wildfire event happens, that that communications infrastructure for the last mile is there, and then that we are utilizing innovation solu-

tions like FPREN and BEACON to get those alerts out to the public when they need them most.

Yes, enhanced 9-1-1, critically important. But the work from those agencies out to the public, that is just as important. That is another piece of the chain that we cannot forget.

Ms. CASTOR. It is all that coordination, because in a catastrophe and emergencies they are locally managed, State coordinated, and federally supported. And it seems like what we are missing right now is the Federal supportive piece of it, to take a hatchet to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, that puts those grants at risk for the infrastructure we need, the Federal grants, not to mention all of the resiliency grants, all of the attacks on Federal Emergency Management Agency. FEMA needs reform, but it can't be eliminated. We would be—everyone would be in dire straits.

Mr. WRIGHT. We have a proven model. In public broadcasting, we have made the investments in the past. We need to continue making those. And I think it was Tip O'Neill who used to say that all politics is local. All alerting is local. And that is where the public broadcasters come in to play.

Ms. CASTOR. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Fry, for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Mr. FRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for having this very important and vital hearing today.

Thank you to our witnesses for your candid and accurate testimony.

Public safety is critically important to me, especially as a Representative of a coastal district in South Carolina. For us, storms like hurricanes are not if but when. And when disaster strikes, communication is not just important, it is lifesaving. In August, I had the privilege of visiting the Marion County Sheriff's Office in my district to learn firsthand about the role that programs like FirstNet play in supporting our first responders. And what I saw was encouraging. But I think it underscores how critically reliable communications are so important when disaster hits.

At the end of the day, it doesn't matter to our first responders—who it doesn't matter to our first responders who is providing them with the service but if the service is being provided. Emergencies can happen in an instant, and it is our duty in Congress to make sure and to—that those who are on the ground have the necessary tools they need to do their jobs effectively, securely, and without delay.

Sheriff, we will start with you. As you know, FirstNet was established by Congress to give our first responders a dedicated nationwide broadband network. AT&T currently operates under that authority.

At the same time, providers like Verizon and T-Mobile are doing their own thing, offering public safety services. So, from your experience on the ground, how do you see these different offerings working together in practice? And what steps should Congress consider to ensure that the focus stays on the reliability and interoperability for our first responders?

Sheriff DICUS. So, to your question, we are an agency that is an example of exactly what you are asking. Our county is so vast, we can't just rely just on FirstNet because of cell tower coverage in other places, so our computers automatically do a strength test, essentially, that is constantly happening while a sheriff's deputy drives around. And whichever service provider is the strongest signal, that is the one the computer automatically goes with.

So they are working together in those aspects. I think what we are talking about is really reliability when we need it, and we are talking about the amount of traffic during an emergency that may go over one of those systems where FirstNet is exclusive to public safety. And that is certainly why we would like to see the buildout continue.

Mr. FRY. Thank you for that.

You have also highlighted both the successes and challenges with FirstNet's rollout, including the reinvestment of funds into new infrastructure, but also the risks from outages, vandalism, and cyber attacks. Looking ahead, what steps should Congress prioritize to ensure reliability and resiliency in these networks, particularly as FirstNet authority approaches its 2027 sunset date?

Sheriff DICUS. Certainly start looking at particularly FirstNet towers and those that are specific to public safety as critical infrastructure. So, in other words, there are security aspects, maybe even the way they are designed and built. We have had a lot of talk this morning about copper and getting cut, for instance. Fiber is no different. And, actually, in some cases I think it is harder to repair fiber. At least that has been our experience. So physical security and then cybersecurity are number-one priorities. And, if we can use the Federal Government's help to do that, I think we are in the right place.

Mr. FRY. Thank you for that.

We frequently discuss AI and its potential impact on this committee. Emergency communications are no different. AI will change the game. Dr. Fontes, you also note that Next Generation 9-1-1 will allow Americans to send texts, images, videos, and other forms of data directly to call centers, data that could be enhanced or triaged through AI tools.

How do you see AI shaping the effectiveness of Next Generation 9-1-1 in practice? And what safeguards should Congress consider to ensure that this technology strengthens rather than complicates the emergency response system?

Dr. FONTES. Thank you for your question.

AI is beginning to enter into the 9-1-1 space. In the Next Generation 9-1-1 environment, when data are allowed to come in to 9-1-1 centers, videos, et cetera, the use of AI, as I would envision it, would allow us to either have supporting tools that may hear or see something that the human ear or eye cannot see or hear. And so, therefore, it may provide more correct situational issues, enabling the field responders to know what they are going into when they respond to that emergency.

I think there is also a variety of opportunities dealing with language translations, transcripts, record maintenance, and the back-room aspects of Next Generation or 9-1-1 systems at large. But

you need that Next Generation 9-1-1 system to have that data flow into the 9-1-1 centers.

So that is one of the fundamental aspects I believe is critical to the use of advanced technologies like AI in serving the best possible 9-1-1 service to the public.

Mr. FRY. Thank you for that.

Mr. Chairman, I see my time has expired, and I yield back.

Mr. HUDSON. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentlelady from California, Ms. Barragán, for 5 minutes to ask your questions.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, Sheriff, I want to take a moment to thank you for your statement and for your position and following the law in California, and for your statement of how it is so important that, when you protect the community, you protect everybody regardless of immigration status. So I know you—you took some heat for that, and I appreciate that you are looking through the lens of protecting everybody and that you do not ask about status or require proof of citizenship to file a report or to make a call. When somebody sees a crime, we want them to call 9-1-1. We want them to report it and to work with you. So I want to start by thanking you for that.

Sheriff, I also want to ask you, do you think that there is a benefit to funding the Corporation for Public Broadcasting?

Sheriff DICUS. I think this is an all-hands approach. And, if you heard my testimony today, if these systems are redundant to each other, whether it is the AM radio system, we never know—we don't have the benefit of knowing in any disaster what is actually going to happen, and the fact we would have redundancies with all those systems—I am telling you, public safety—if we have to get the can and string out, we are going to do it to protect the public.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. OK. But it is a simple question: Do you think there is a benefit at all to funding it?

Sheriff DICUS. I do think there is a benefit to funding it because it may be the only resource that we can communicate over should everything else go down.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Great. Yes. I also noticed that you were a guest on the "Inland Edition," which is PBS, to talk about law enforcement for community members. I am assuming there is a positive benefit to the community for you going on and doing that show?

Sheriff DICUS. Particularly as it relates to the economic engine in my county and how it works and to be able to take law enforcement executives to understand that and know how to protect it.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Thank you.

Because we know that, when disaster strikes, every second counts. And, right now, our emergency communication systems are at risk of failing. And the Next Generation Warning System is central to keeping communities safe.

Sheriff, if you had \$88 billion, would you spend some of that money to invest in Next Gen 9-1-1?

Sheriff DICUS. Absolutely.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. That is the answer I hope every Republican would have had. But you know what? They didn't do it. When they passed their so-called Big Beautiful Bill, which is a big ugly bill, they really abandoned a bipartisan agreement to invest in pro-

grams like Next Gen 9–1–1 as a result of money raised from a spectrum auction. And that is why you are hearing so much about it today, because there is an opportunity—there is \$88 billion going to be raised from this auction. And House Republicans are refusing to put money from those proceeds into things like this, which, as we have heard today, is lifesaving.

It is so critical, and it is so necessary—just like when every House Republican voted against the American Rescue Plan, something else you and San Bernardino County have benefited from. I have seen the Valley Communications Center in San Bernardino recently opened up, and you praised it as something that is going to help benefit public safety and response time. So thank you for taking positions and making sure you are putting safety first.

We know that the rescissions at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting have put in jeopardy the mission of these grant programs to help local broadcasters serve as lifelines during emergencies. Right now, in Louisiana, a station can't replace an aging transmitter, which has put emergency alerts at risk in a hurricane-prone area. In Montana, a rural station faces failing equipment and likely loss of service, leaving remote communications without reliable alerts. In central Florida, a station has been forced to postpone critical equipment upgrades and is down to a single engineer, jeopardizing emergency broadcast in another hurricane-prone region. Without Next Gen, outdated equipment leaves communities blind to disaster, and this is unacceptable.

Mr. Wright, with CBP no longer administering the Next Gen—or the NGWS grants, what happens to rural and underserved communities if FEMA fails to ensure that program funding reaches local broadcasters?

Mr. WRIGHT. They suffer.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. What does—

Mr. WRIGHT. They will not receive the alerting that they desperately need.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. And what does that mean for communities?

Mr. WRIGHT. It degrades the culture within that community. It puts the citizens of that community in peril. And that is what the public broadcasters across the United States are trying to solve to, through the various projects that we work on like FPREN and BEACON. But the funding support for the infrastructure is absolutely critical.

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Great. Thank you.

This is why I worked with Congressman Menendez and McClain Delaney to a letter to FEMA, which we sent this morning, urging the agency to share a clear plan to maintain the NGWS funding for local broadcasters and ensure continuity of service to rural underserved communities.

And, with that, I thank all the witnesses. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. KEAN [presiding]. Thank you.

The gentlewoman yields back.

The Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida for 5 minutes.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Wright, it is good to see you. Go Gators. I am disappointed, no orange and blue tie. Dr. Fontes is repping for you, though.

Mr. WRIGHT. It is blue. The doctor and I, you know, we coordinated today for you.

Mrs. CAMMACK. I appreciate that, even though I know we had a little bit of a rough weekend, and I heard our—my colleague, Representative Castor, was giving us a bit of grief, but we are Gators so—

Mr. WRIGHT. But we appreciate her sensitivity to the Gator Nation.

Mrs. CAMMACK. That is right. That is right.

But I also want to acknowledge all our first responders in the room. Thank you all so much for your service and for your families' service. As the wife of a firefighter, SWAT medic, I know firsthand what it is like, and so deeply grateful for everything that y'all do.

I am also disappointed in some of the very divisive and partisan language that I just heard from my colleague on the other side of the aisle. Emergency communications, it is not a Republican or a Democrat issue. It is an American issue. And so I am just a little disappointed that it has to turn into a food fight.

But we are here because we have a real issue that we have to solve. We need to figure out a way to update our systems. And, as a Floridian, I have seen time and time again how vital our reliable communications are during a disaster and truly how scary it can be when they go down. So, whether it is a hurricane knocking on our door that is taking out our power and cell sites, or Federal and local responders struggling to operate on the same systems, these gaps can really mean the difference between life or death. Certainly, as someone who represents a district that saw three major hurricanes in the span of 13 months, we know this firsthand.

Of course, Florida faces unique challenges. From protecting our seniors in rural communities to keeping millions of our visitors safe every year, this conversation on strengthening public safety communications, whether it is 9-1-1 systems, FirstNet, or other tools, it is critical.

So, having worked those storms, I can say confidently that we need to take an above-all approach when it comes to building out the systems, updating them, and building in redundancies.

I am so excited for today's conversation because it is something that is long overdue. We need a system that is resilient, interoperable, and secure when it comes to the issues in communications that matter most.

So I am going to start with you, Sheriff. One of the promises that Next Gen 9-1-1 has is the ability to transmit texts, images, video, and location data directly to first responders in the field. I can't tell you how many times my husband has been on one system, and he is a city, you know—he works for the city—but then the county is operating on a different system, and maybe there is a mutual aid call coming in from a neighboring county. Some are on FLURS, some are on a different bandwidth. It is tough. And I can tell you firsthand some of the challenges that we have seen with FirstNet in our rural communities.

So what steps can Congress take to ensure nationwide interoperability amongst all of the different networks that our first respond-

ers operate on so that they can move seamlessly amongst jurisdictions, especially during large-scale disasters?

Sheriff DICUS. Well, your example with your husband is very pertinent to this when you are talking about even between fire, sheriff's departments, and police departments. So interoperability by having that common platform, FirstNet, or broadband just for public safety, is first and foremost.

A lot of the modern technologies, both in our handheld radios as well as when we use our cell phones to talk to each other, have the ability to automatically recognize jurisdictional boundaries and then make those connections. Some of it can be done in our dispatch centers. There is technology that allows two disparate radio systems to be plugged in, and now they can turn around and communicate with each other.

I think ensuring simple, straightforward technologies like that and providing really the governance and policy language from the Federal level across the board will allow us to standardize to make sure that we continue to move in the direction you are describing.

Mrs. CAMMACK. I love that. I love that, especially since these are very expensive systems. You know, you have got people investing millions and millions of dollars to upgrade their system only to find that they can't communicate just even a few counties over. So that is really important.

And then my next question is going to be on FirstNet. So the FirstNet authority recently held a workshop in our district to solicit feedback on the priorities from our first responders. In the most recent storm, the minute I got out of my home county, Alachua County, heading west towards the hurricane where it had hit the hardest, my husband immediately lost coverage. I don't have FirstNet, and I didn't have coverage. So this is something that I brought to their attention.

Now, I understand that these individuals are best positioned to help guide infrastructure needs in our communities, but how has your experience been in getting the infrastructure placed where you need it in an emergency situation as it relates to FirstNet?

Sheriff DICUS. In terms of the portability of, like, FirstNet mobile towers and things like that, it is good. They respond. However, what you are talking about is the physical tower itself going down, and that is what your husband experienced.

Mrs. CAMMACK. Right.

Sheriff DICUS. Number one, construction standards, making these things resilient. Also calling it is what it is—critical infrastructure across the United States—securing it, maintaining it, and monitoring it.

Mrs. CAMMACK. And I know I am over my time, but at some point I would like to get on the record some commentary on redundancies and moving away from singular prime towers. I think that that is a disaster in the making. So I will follow up with all of you. But thank you again for each of you being here today. I appreciate you. And go Gators.

Mr. KEAN. The gentlewoman from Florida yields back.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Obernolte.

Mr. OBERNOLTE. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I would like to thank the committee chairman for holding this hearing on what I consider to be a critically important topic.

Sheriff Dicus, welcome back to Washington, DC. San Bernardino County is the largest part of my district, and you have been a great leader for our county and our law enforcement agencies. So thanks for your continued presence and your voice here.

I wanted to ask you about one of the major challenges that we always have in districts like mine, where 78 percent of the land is federally managed, and that creates real challenges when we need to quickly deploy temporary communications infrastructure and response to an emergency or when we are trying to deploy more permanent communications infrastructure to prepare for emergencies.

So can you talk about any obstacles that you have faced in trying to get deployable equipment on federally managed land or trying to build permanent infrastructure on federally managed land?

Sheriff DICUS. Governance and real estate, two of the biggest things when we are talking about communications and expanding across. But in a lot of instances, maybe the U.S. Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management may have repeaters to use on their own radio systems. Common sense would be sharing those towers and really that infrastructure to be able to continue—whether it is a FirstNet system or a county-operated 800 megahertz system. We have experienced barriers, and it is usually bureaucracy are those barriers.

If we can actually put the people who are in charge of those systems and understand that we need to back each other up—and I know you are familiar with this, but in our Barstow area, it is a 5,000-square-mile beat for one deputy. Their backup is a BLM Ranger or a CHB officer on the freeway, and we all have to be able to interoperate. But if it is bureaucracy, we need to fix that. We need to make it straight through. And there are some common-sense approaches. Communication is communication.

Mr. OBERNOLTE. Right. Well, that is why we are all here having this discussion.

I also was very interested in your testimony about the need to establish cybersecurity standards. And I know that the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department had a cybersecurity incident several years ago. Can you talk a little bit about that incident, the way it affected your capabilities, and how cybersecurity standards like the ones you are advocating for would have helped?

Sheriff DICUS. That ransomware attack probably was—in my entire career, and I have been doing this for almost 35 years now—affected the brand of the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department in the way we deliver customer service, which we take great pride in doing it. We also had to rely on a number of our other agencies that weren't affected by this.

And you have to understand—let me see if I can put everybody as quickly as possible into the driver seat of what the sheriff has. You have an insurance company that comes in that becomes the quarterback of this, but yet as the sheriff you are going after the threat actors who did this to you. You want to go out and make arrests and do those types of things. Internationally, that is an impossible issue for a sheriff. But then you call in your three-letter

agencies that come in and support you on that, but yet you also have the responsibility to get back the data on behalf of your constituents, both the victims, the suspects, and your employees. It puts you in this untenable situation.

In order to prevent that, we need to have the best standards, DoD-type standards, to secure our information. There is a lot of basics in how you operate this. But as threat actors become more sophisticated, we need to be on the cutting edge of that to protect ourselves.

Mr. OBERNOLTE. Thank you, Sheriff Dicus. It is great to see you again.

Dr. Fontes, I found your testimony very compelling on the need for Next Generation 9-1-1. And I think everyone here on the dais would completely agree that this is something that we have to get across the finish line.

As part of your testimony, you were discussing the need to stop continually coming up with cost estimates and actually move into implementation. But from our point of view, part of the problem is that the latest cost estimate—I think you cited in your testimony—is, adjusted for inflation, \$15 billion.

So my question is, you know, as a technologist myself, these call centers, they already have computers, they already have communications. From my standpoint, Next Gen 9-1-1 is just software. It is software on the consumer side, maybe with the cell phone operators, and it is software on the call center side.

How on Earth does it cost \$15 billion? I mean, where does that money go if it is just software that we are talking about?

Dr. FONTES. Oh, thank you. I appreciate your question.

I would contend that it isn't just software. Many of our 9-1-1 centers don't even have broadband capabilities. So there is that connectivity issue that has to take place. There also has to be the technology in the centers to enable the utilization of data and information coming in. And a lot of these centers don't have that type of technology that would enable what I call information-rich or data-rich 9-1-1 calls.

So if it were just a computer solution, it would have been there a long time ago. It is far more than that. It is planning, it is coordination at State level, it is backroom management of information and data and files and records, and the list goes on.

You know, hopefully, you will have an opportunity to, if you haven't already been to a—go to a 9-1-1 center and see what it is that is going on there and to ask them how this project that they are engaged in is different than the legacy 9-1-1 systems we have today.

Mr. OBERNOLTE. Sure. No, I have done that, and I have asked that.

Dr. FONTES. Yes.

Mr. OBERNOLTE. And the centers that I went in had broadband and had computers. So, you know, as a software guy myself, this seems like a software problem. It sure seems like we should be able to solve it for less than \$15 billion. But I welcome the continued discussion.

I see we are out of time.

Dr. FONTES. Welcome that.

Mr. OBERNOLTE. I yield back.

Mr. JOYCE [presiding]. The gentleman yields.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Kean, for his 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

As we hold this hearing on public safety communications, we are only 2 days away from the 24th anniversary of the September 11 attacks. And when those planes hit those towers, the communications, emergency and otherwise, went down immediately.

New Jersey also, uniquely, is subject to many national weather phenomena, whether it was Superstorm Sandy, Hurricane Irene, Ida, and so many others that have hit New Jersey since 2001. So we are uniquely aware as citizens that we need to make sure that all of our communications are secure, redundant, and whether they be broadband, whether they be AM radio, whether they be—any—whatever the next generation of telecommunications it is, we need to make sure that the communications between the people who are going into harm's way to protect our fellow citizens or the communication with the families at home who are being impacted, small businesses—well, we need to make sure that they have information quickly, and accurate information as well.

And as we are looking about how we evaluate and update these emergency communications and public safety communications, we need to make sure that the authorities are dynamic and responsive, and we need to make sure that the needs of the first responders are central to these missions.

One of the primary concerns I hear from first responders in my district is about the importance of interoperability. And having been a volunteer firefighter and an EMT myself, I—which I suspect if you polled the room of firefighters, police officers, and emergency medical professionals as well, that they would want to make sure that there is a product that is reliable, that fits the budget, and is compatible with the equipment that they may already have.

So, Sheriff Dicus, as we continue to improve our public safety communications, what can we do to make sure that we are keeping our primary focus on the needs of the first responders who are already having to do more with less?

Sheriff DICUS. So we are talking about basic communication, and I like how you started with what happened on September 11. Out of a lot of those studies, those local, State, and Federal were not communicating. So that is talking on a face-to-face basis, of course. And now we are talking about that interoperability question you asked.

So whether we are talking about a legacy system, an 800 megahertz system, there are technologies that, as my colleague Dr. Fontes has said, IP-based that allow those systems to communicate with each other, more importantly, automatically so that the first responder doesn't have to change to a repeater or something along those lines, and those technologies exist.

Being able to fund those, FirstNet having that common picture in terms of broadband, those are critical to allow the folks to do their job really seamlessly without having to think twice about how to make those connections themselves.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you. Thank you for that answer.

Mr. Newton, during the attacks on September 11, communication networks were either knocked out completely or they were quickly overloaded, resulting in a complete communications breakdown. How have priority and preemption increased your ability to respond to large-scale emergencies and maintain situational awareness among first responders?

Mr. NEWTON. Specifically with the features of priority and preemption—and priority means that we will continue to have access to these—this advanced data, the streams of video, and the information that we need to make good decisions, as well as preemption or ruthless preemption. Whereas, short of it being a 9–1–1 call, our call is more important than whatever else is going on there. And that is what it allows us to do. It allow us to make those links. It allows me to call for help and say I need these resources to come help me manage this incident.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you.

And, Sheriff Dicus, in your testimony you mentioned land mobile radio. Can you discuss how your department uses land mobile radio, and do you believe that mobile provider services will replace land mobile radio?

Sheriff DICUS. So as of right now—and this is obviously a technological argument in public safety circles—you need both, because you can't depend on one or the other, at least at this point. Some day, as FirstNet and things advance, we may be able to rely on them. But right now, in a county the size of San Bernardino and what many sheriffs deal with with these large counties, it is a better position to have both.

Mr. KEAN. OK. Thank you all for your time, your insights, and for making the time to be here today.

I yield back.

Mr. JOYCE. The gentleman yields.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Mullin, for his 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. MULLIN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I want to thank all of our witnesses for your testimony today and for what you do to keep our communities safe.

Last week, I introduced bipartisan legislation, the Resilience Emergency Alert Communications and Training Act, or REACT Act. And I appreciate the support of my colleague Mr. Weber of Texas by the way of his cosponsorship to make it bipartisan.

This bill would provide technical and financial assistance to State, local, and Tribal authorities to conduct end-to-end testing and community-based exercises of warning systems. It is a simple idea. We want the Federal Government to support our local emergency managers so that they are ready to alert the public when disaster strikes.

Mr. Newton, you have had firsthand experience leading communities through disasters. In your experience responding to these disasters, what are the biggest barriers to sending clear, effective alerts quickly, and what kind of preparation do local communities need to overcome those challenges?

I know that is a broad question there, but if you could address that.

Mr. NEWTON. Thank you. I think the first of these is the obstacle of the costs. It is the obstacle of the software. What platform are you going to use to actually activate the system? Typically, those are not a one-time cost. It is more of a subscription. So that is the first obstacle.

I think the other challenge we have is we focus so much on the technology that allows us to do the alerting that we don't take the time to really focus in on—there is a person that actually has to ingest information, make a decision, maybe determine do they have the authorities to make certain decisions, and then act on those decisions.

I think one of the challenges—I have done this for a long time, but yet that is one of the more stressful things in my job is to actually set off an alert and craft a message that is both relevant and meaningful and actionable. And so at this point there is actually a resource out of University of Albany, a dashboard that helps you craft effective messaging. And so I think that is the challenge. Then I think, in line with what you are suggesting, we have got to practice. We have got to train, we have got to practice, and you got to keep practicing.

Mr. MULLIN. I appreciate that answer very much, Mr. Newton.

My next question is to Mr. Wright. You have led the development of emergency alerting systems, including BEACON. As I understand it, this tool and other third-party commercial emergency alerting systems often rely on Federal alerting infrastructure, whether it is IPAWS, EAS, or WEA, or public broadcasting transmitters and towers.

So, Mr. Wright, I am wondering why so many communities use third-party alert and warning systems. Could you describe what gaps remain in public alerting tools and how we can close those gaps?

Mr. WRIGHT. Thank you for your question, Congressman. It was actually music to my ears to hear that you are using The Warn Room resources to help your agency learn how to craft more effective alerts.

At the University of Florida and through the public broadcasting infrastructure, our job is to take those alerts that are coming directly from the agencies at the county, State, and Federal levels, and then transmit those out to the public as quickly and as efficiently as possible. That is our role in the overall alerting ecosystem.

We have developed an extraordinary partnership with the Florida Division of Emergency Management at the State level, but then also at the local level with county-level emergency managers to ensure that they know that they have a trusted partner in the alerting process and that they can depend on their local public broadcaster to get their information out exactly as they have crafted it. That is really the value of BEACON.

One of them is that it is taking your exact messaging, and then the AI is translating that exactly as it is put into the system, and then it is broadcast out on the BEACON system 24/7. It is truly the first alerting device or channel anywhere in the world, and it is already proven to be very effective.

Mr. MULLIN. Thank you for that. And as I close, I just want to underscore the points you made earlier in the hearing.

Earlier this year, I co-led a bipartisan appropriations request to support FEMA's Next Generation Warning System's program, but the majority and the Trump administration just rescinded funding for the Corporation of Public Broadcasting, and as a direct result it can no longer administer those grants. That decision means emergency alerts won't get to those who need them most. This is the opposite, in my opinion, of what we need to be doing.

So I thank you all again for your testimony, for being here.

And with that, I yield back.

Mr. JOYCE. The gentleman yields.

I now yield myself 5 minutes for questioning.

First of all, thanks to the panel for being here today.

Accessibility to emergency response services is critical in rural communities where connection can sometimes be disrupted and sometimes outright unavailable. Improved coordination of emergency responders is essential as public safety communication services are further developed to address the needs of these rural communities.

There are more than 2,100 agencies in Pennsylvania, and that represents thousands of FirstNet connections. This underscores the need for Congress to reauthorize FirstNet's authority.

The district that I am honored to represent includes 12 rural counties in Pennsylvania, from the battlefields of Gettysburg in Adams County to close to the Flight 93 Memorial in Somerset County. My district has geographical barriers that create problems for first responders trying to communicate in times of crisis, as well as constituents trying to access emergency response services by making a 9-1-1 call.

Sheriff Dicus, you mentioned in your testimony that you and members of your association serve vast rural territories. Can you elaborate on communication challenges that these law enforcement officers and first responders face in these rural communities?

Sheriff DICUS. Sure. In these rural communities, and I am talking in excess of like a 3½-hour drive time, there are not infrastructure things in the ground where we are talking about fiber. We are talking about, in some cases, cell towers—that is how remote these places are. So to be able to communicate, you develop—or you rely on your legacy system, which is 800 megahertz system.

In the past—they have since advanced, but in the past, the law enforcement officer would actually know the boundaries of that radio system to be able to switch to and from repeaters. And I am glad to report to you today, now that occurs automatically. But that ends up being the only reliable communication source. Having something like FirstNet expanded would now allow for that redundancy and the use of the computer, not just the handheld radio.

Mr. JOYCE. Sheriff, how can Congress ensure that rural communities—and yours being very similar to mine—how can we ensure that first responders have access to the most cutting-edge communications technology and infrastructure that is possible?

Previously in this hearing you stated that urban communities often have more access to the funds than rural communities have. Would you please explain further?

Sheriff DICUS. A lot of the formulas that are related to funding across the board, whether you are talking about Homeland Security grant funding, they are related usually to population. And, of course, the rural areas are going to suffer just as a result of their population.

I think we need to take into account critical infrastructure across the board and really standardize communication for all. It is important to everybody to be able to have—to make a 9-1-1 call.

Mr. JOYCE. Thank you.

Just 2 months ago in Pennsylvania, we experienced significant statewide 9-1-1 disruptions. Some callers who dialed 9-1-1 in an emergency situation experienced that their calls were not delivered to 9-1-1 operators. According to Pennsylvania's Emergency Management Agency, the cause of the outages within the Next Gen 9-1-1 system was a defect in the operating system. A wireless emergency alert issued to the public notified the individuals to call their local 9-1-1 center directly or to call the local nonemergency line. In a true emergency, locating these numbers can waste precious time. This intermittent outage lasted for several hours.

Dr. Fontes, can you speak on the safeguards in place to address an outage in the Next Gen 9-1-1 system like the one that recently occurred in Pennsylvania?

Dr. FONTES. Thank you. I think it is important to recognize the Next Generation 9-1-1 has built into its purposes the idea of resiliency. So if the center were to go down, the ability to move 9-1-1 communications to other centers to be able to respond to the emergency, with the data that is available to that community that went down, will better serve the public and provide the continuance of 9-1-1 service.

Mr. JOYCE. I think you have outlined what is so important. What has been so important to this hearing is the continuance, the ability to have that overlap to serve 9-1-1 emergencies.

As we work to address connectivity for constituents and for first responders across the country, it is important that we prioritize bringing this connection to rural communities. It is equally as important that we build a functional system that works to provide emergency response services without failure.

Americans need the reliable connection that they can depend on in times of medical need and in times of disaster. And this includes the first responders that we count on each and every hour of each and every day.

Thank you all for being present today. I yield back.

Seeing that there are no further Members wishing to be recognized, I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today.

I ask unanimous consent to insert in the record the documents included on the staff hearing documents list. Without objection, this will be the order.

I remind Members that they have 10 business days to submit questions for the record, and I ask the witnesses to respond to these questions promptly.

Members should submit their questions by close of business on Tuesday, September 23.

And without objection, the subcommittee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:35 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

[Material submitted for inclusion in the record follows:]

Documents for the Record – 09.09.25

1. A July 7, 2025, letter from NYSAC to House and Senate Commerce Committee leadership.
2. A letter from NCDIT to Richard Hudson regarding NG911.
3. A September 9, 2025, letter from APCO International letter Energy and Commerce Committee leadership.
4. Testimony from the International Association of Fire Chiefs.
5. A March 17, 2025, letter from first responders to House and Senate leadership.
6. A March 21, 2025, letter from organizations representing state legislatures, state chief information officers, mayors, cities, and counties to House and Senate Commerce Committee leadership.
7. A letter from NHMA and other organizations to House and Senate Commerce Committee leadership.
8. A September 9, 2025, letter from public safety coalitions to House Energy and Commerce Committee leadership.
9. A July 28, 2025, letter from Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns to House Energy and Commerce Committee leadership.
10. Testimony from the Fraternal Order of Police.
11. Statement for the record from Intrado.
12. A September 9, 2025, letter from Norma Torres to Committee leadership.
13. An article titled, “9/11’s failures led to a first-responder network — which will vanish if Congress doesn’t act.”



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*President:* Hon. Benjamin Boykin II, Westchester County  
*Executive Director:* Stephen J. Acquario, Esq.

July 7, 2025

The Honorable Ted Cruz  
 Chairman  
 Senate Committee on  
 Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
 Ranking Member  
 Senate Committee on  
 Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Brett Guthrie  
 Chairman  
 House Committee on  
 Energy and Commerce  
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
 Ranking Member  
 House Committee on  
 Energy and Commerce  
 Washington, DC 20510

RE: First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) Sunset Provision

Dear Senator Cruz, Senator Cantwell, Representative Guthrie, and Representative Pallone:

The New York State Association of Counties (NYSAC) strongly urges Congress to eliminate the statutory sunset provision for the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) and ensure its continued operation beyond February 2027.

NYSAC is the voice of county government in New York State, representing all 62 counties. Our members encompass diverse geographies from the rural North Country and Finger Lakes regions to the suburban Hudson Valley and urban centers like New York City. Counties serve as the backbone of public safety infrastructure, directly operating and coordinating essential services, including 911 dispatch centers, emergency medical services, sheriff's departments, and comprehensive disaster response operations. Reliable and prioritized communications are critical to fulfilling these responsibilities and ensuring the safety of the public and first responders alike.

FirstNet has become a critical element of the public safety communications system in New York State. Its dedicated, secure broadband network enables firefighters, law enforcement, emergency medical services providers, and other emergency personnel to maintain reliable communication during both routine operations and large-scale emergencies and natural disasters. Unlike commercial networks, FirstNet is built specifically for public safety, with features like priority access, preemption capabilities, and federal oversight that ensure first responders can stay connected even when commercial systems are overloaded or unavailable.

*Committed to counties since 1925*

*Albany, Allegany, Broome, Broome, Cattaraugus, Cayuga, Chautauque, Chemung, Chenango, Clinton, Columbia, Cortland, Delaware, Dutchess, Erie, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Genesee, Greene, Hamilton, Herkimer, Jefferson, Kings, Lewis, Livingston, Madison, Monroe, Montgomery, Nassau, New York, Niagara, Oneida, Onondaga, Ontario, Orange, Orleans, Otsego, Putnam, Rensselaer, Queens, Richmond, Rockland, St. Lawrence, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Suffolk, Sullivan, Tioga, Tompkins, Ulster, Warren, Washington, Wayne, Westchester, Wyoming, Yates*



Beyond enhancing coordination during emergencies, FirstNet has made measurable progress in extending services to rural and hard-to-reach areas. These improvements have reduced longstanding coverage gaps that previously compromised response capabilities in many of our counties.

With nearly 30,000 public safety agencies and over seven million connections nationwide, FirstNet has an essential role in modern public safety operations. Congressional action is now needed to ensure it continues serving those who protect our communities. We respectfully urge Congress to act swiftly to eliminate the statutory sunset provision and preserve this indispensable resource for the nation's first responders.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Stephen J. Acquario  
Executive Director

cc: New York Congressional Delegation





**Josh Stein**  
Governor

**Teena Piccione**  
Secretary and State Chief Information Officer

The Honorable Richard Hudson, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Communications & Technology  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Hudson:

I want to sincerely thank the Committee for its steadfast dedication to exploring and promoting the incredible potential of Next Generation 911 (NG 911) beyond North Carolina. This revolutionary technology has not only enhanced our ability to respond to emergencies swiftly and reliably but has also established a national standard for exceptional 911 services, something we are immensely proud of.

At the heart of our NG 911 system is a dedicated and secure network built specifically for 911 traffic and related data, seamlessly integrating the advanced FirstNet Wireless Solution. This network ensures seamless connections, continuous communication, and rapid, effective responses to 911 calls.

Our strategic investment in developing this network has dramatically increased the safety of our citizens by providing vital services—at no cost to local governments managing 911 calls.

I strongly encourage you and the Committee to advocate for legislation and funding that supports the expansion and implementation of NG 911 in other states. We are steadfast in our belief that this issue extends beyond state lines and is a critical national mission that offers peace of mind and essential support to those in need. Your leadership can help ensure every community benefits from the secure, resilient capabilities NG 911 provides, creating a positive impact that reaches beyond our state.

Hurricane Helene in 2024 vividly demonstrated the effectiveness of NG 911 during emergencies. When the storm hit North Carolina, 19 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) in the western regions experienced connectivity issues. Thanks to our robust and secure private network dedicated to 911 communications, we quickly and securely rerouted calls to 23 alternative PSAPs statewide. From September 26 to 28, we handled an impressive 90,000 emergency calls across the state — representing a 55% increase compared to the previous year.

In June 2025, major associations called on Congress for funds to support the nationwide deployment of NG 911, highlighting the need to replace outdated systems for improved reliability and security.

I am genuinely excited about the opportunity to work with you and your colleagues to address this vital issue. Another key focus is reauthorizing the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority), which plays a crucial role in strengthening public safety communications. In North Carolina, FirstNet is a vital part of our emergency response framework, providing an essential backup for our PSAPs. This dedicated, secure, and separate network redundancy is also provided at no cost localities for the PSAPs that choose to participate.

The advancements NG 911 offers to public safety communications are truly extraordinary, enabling us to serve our citizens more efficiently and dependably during crises. I urge you to take bold action to ensure all Americans have access to this life-saving technology. Supporting the reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority is also crucial for maintaining secure and reliable connections to our 911 services. We welcome questions about our model and look forward to engaging in meaningful discussions on this topic.

Thank you for your commitment to improving public safety communications and your dedication to policies that protect the well-being of the American people. Together, we have the chance to make a lasting difference!

Sincerely,

*Teena Piccione*

Teena Piccione  
Chairman, North Carolina 911 Board  
Secretary and State CIO of North Carolina



JOSH H. STEIN  
GOVERNOR

TEENA W. PICCIONE  
SECRETARY & STATE CHIEF  
INFORMATION OFFICER  
NC 911 BOARD CHAIR

MELANIE A. JONES  
NC 911 BOARD VICE CHAIR

L.V. POKEY HARRIS  
NC 911 BOARD EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Honorable Richard Hudson, Chairman  
Subcommittee on Communications & Technology  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Chairman Hudson:

I want to sincerely thank the Committee for its dedication to taking the time to understand and promote the potential of Next Generation 911 (NG 911) beyond North Carolina and into other parts of the country. Through this transformative technology, North Carolina has not only responded to emergencies faster and more reliably but has also set a national standard for exceptional 911 services that we are genuinely proud of.

The backbone of our NG 911 system is its ability to operate on a dedicated, secure network that exclusively handles 911 traffic and related data, integrating the innovative FirstNet Wireless Solution. Our strategic investment in creating this network has significantly enhanced the safety of our citizens, providing invaluable services at no cost to the local governments that handle 911 calls.

I strongly encourage you and the rest of the Committee to advocate for legislation and funding to expand NG 911 implementation in other states. This effort is not just a local matter; it's a vital national priority that offers peace of mind and crucial support to those in need. Your support can help ensure every community benefits from the secure, resilient capabilities NG 911 provides, positively affecting our state and beyond.

The 2024 storm, Hurricane Helene, exemplifies NG 911's capabilities during crises. When the storm struck North Carolina, 19 Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) in the western areas faced connectivity issues. Thanks to our robust private network dedicated to 911 communications, we were able to promptly and securely reroute 911 calls to 23 alternative PSAPs across the state. Between September 26 and 28, 2024, we handled an incredible 90,000 emergency calls across the entire state, a 55% increase compared to the same period of the previous year.

In June 2025, NASNA, along with APCO International, NENA, and iCERT, sent a joint letter to Congress calling for "essential funds" to support the nationwide deployment of NG 911. The letter emphasizes that federal funding is crucial for upgrading the aging 911 systems across the country, many of which rely on outdated analog technology. These systems are less reliable, less secure, and harder to maintain while trying to meet the growing demands of emergency responders and the public. I am genuinely excited about working with you and your colleagues on this critical issue.

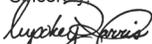
P O Box 17209, Raleigh, NC 27619-7209  
4101 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4101  
Telephone: 919-754-6624  
it.nc.gov/nc911board

Another key area for action is reauthorizing the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority), which is essential for strengthening public safety. In North Carolina, FirstNet is a vital part of our emergency response system, providing an essential layer of redundancy for our PSAPs. It allows communications to remain uninterrupted, so that response to 911 calls remains quick and effective.

The progress NG 911 is making in public safety communications is genuinely remarkable, allowing us to serve our citizens more efficiently and reliably during crises. I urge you to take decisive steps to ensure every American has access to this lifesaving technology. We welcome questions about our model and are eager to engage. Additionally, your support in reauthorizing the First Responder Network Authority is key to maintaining this secure and reliable link to our 911 services.

Thank you for your continued commitment to improving public safety communications and your dedication to policies that protect the well-being of the American people. Our collaborative efforts will make a difference in the lives of so many!

Sincerely,



L.V. Fokey Harris

Executive Director, North Carolina 911 Board  
President, National Association of State 911 Administrators (NASNA)



### Overview

Next Generation 911 (NG 911) is a custom-built, private internet network (Emergency Services Internet Protocol Network or ESInet) solely dedicated to ensuring a secure and reliable connection between the 911 caller and the 911 call center. In addition to providing a secure connection, the private network enhances communication by delivering calls, texts, images, and videos between North Carolina's Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs), while also improving caller location accuracy during emergencies.

Under state law, the North Carolina 911 Board must contract for a custom, private internet network and has partnered with AT&T to serve all 124 PSAPs funded by the Board. Additionally, 22 other agencies, including higher education institutions and law enforcement, have joined the network to enhance public safety during crises.

### Contractual Implementation of Next Generation 911 In North Carolina

- Over the last seven years, all N.C. 911 Board-funded PSAPs have switched to AT&T's custom, secure, private internet network.
- N.C. 911 Board-funded PSAPs connect to AT&T's custom, private internet network, ensuring resiliency during network interruptions like fiber cuts or significant damage.
- If a PSAP can't answer 911 calls due to high volume or infrastructure issues, AT&T's custom, private internet network will instantly reroute calls to a designated PSAP, transmitting the caller's phone number and location without delay.
- In March 2023, the N.C. 911 Board approved the FirstNet Wireless Redundant Solution to enhance 911 call resiliency for Board-funded PSAPs.
- A first-of-its-kind, 24/7 Network Monitoring and Assistance Center (NMAC) that monitors the NG 911 network is staffed by technicians from the N.C. 911 Board.
- The N.C. 911 Board revised the AT&T NG 911 contract to extend it for seven years, starting November 4, 2024.

### Impact

Hurricane Helene struck North Carolina on September 27, 2024, becoming the state's most destructive storm. The NG 911 solution proved essential, confirming the North Carolina 911 Board's investment in this system.

During the storm, AT&T's custom, private internet network and call-handling equipment functioned effectively. Calls to 911 were automatically rerouted from overwhelmed and impacted PSAPs to unaffected ones. At the storm's peak, 19 PSAPs in western North Carolina had their calls redirected to 23 partner PSAPs in other parts of the state, ensuring callers reached trained 911 operators.

The North Carolina 911 Board staff, AT&T, and other vendor partners continuously monitored AT&T's custom, private internet network performance and coordinated efforts to involve additional PSAPs, improving the efficiency of 911 call processing across the state.

P O Box 17209, Raleigh, NC 27619-7209  
4101 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4101  
Telephone: 919-754-6624  
[it.nc.gov/nc911board](http://it.nc.gov/nc911board)



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Jessica Long

September 9, 2025

The Honorable Brett Guthrie  
Chair, Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Richard Hudson  
Chair, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology

The Honorable Doris Matsui  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology

Dear Representatives Guthrie, Pallone, Hudson, and Matsui:

On behalf of the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International,<sup>1</sup> I thank you for your ongoing leadership in advancing public safety communications. As the first responders on the frontlines who answer 9-1-1 calls and coordinate emergency response, APCO's members know firsthand that reliable, interoperable, and secure communications are essential to the protection of life and property. Today's hearing provides an important opportunity to strengthen emergency communications nationwide, including by underscoring the importance of Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) and FirstNet as essential components of a modern, resilient public safety communications ecosystem.

Federal investment is critical to fully deploy NG9-1-1 and provide emergency communications centers (ECCs) with the tools they need to perform their lifesaving work. NG9-1-1 represents a transformative upgrade to our nation's public safety communications infrastructure. By enabling the receipt and exchange of text, data, photos, and video, NG9-1-1 provides ECCs with real-time, actionable

<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1935, APCO is the world's oldest and largest organization of public safety communications professionals. APCO is a non-profit association with over 40,000 members, primarily consisting of state and local government employees who manage and operate public safety communications systems – including 9-1-1 emergency communications centers, emergency operations centers, radio networks, and information technology – for law enforcement, fire, emergency medical, and other public safety agencies.

information. These capabilities will improve situational awareness, enhance decision-making, and allow 9-1-1 professionals to coordinate resources more effectively during emergencies. NG9-1-1 will also strengthen interoperability between local, state, and national public safety systems, ensuring that no community is left behind and that information flows seamlessly across jurisdictions.

Congress can ensure nationwide NG9-1-1 deployment by enacting legislation to establish a federal grant program supporting the transition. The public safety community supports legislative language unanimously passed by the Committee last year as part of the Spectrum Auction Reauthorization Act (H.R. 3565). NG9-1-1 deployment remains a national security and public safety priority, and we call on Congress to take swift action to address this need.

Critical to the success of NG9-1-1 and public safety communications is a dedicated broadband network that ensures first responders can reliably communicate during emergencies. Today, millions of first responders throughout the nation rely on FirstNet, the nation's single nationwide public safety broadband network designed by and for public safety professionals, to carry out their lifesaving missions. This is why we urge Congress to permanently reauthorize the FirstNet Authority before its sunset. FirstNet provides secure, reliable, high-speed connectivity in the field, enabling first responders to receive critical information from ECCs, share real-time situational updates, and coordinate response efforts during both routine and large-scale incidents. Its priority and preemption features ensure that first responders maintain uninterrupted access to communications even during natural disasters and other emergencies that generate heavy network traffic. The independent FirstNet Authority Board, guided by input from public safety leaders, has been critical in ensuring FirstNet remains accountable in delivering reliable support to public safety. The first responders who rely on FirstNet during emergencies deserve certainty and uninterrupted access to this high-speed broadband network.

In addition, we commend the Federal Communications Commission for its unanimous, bipartisan decision last year to create a Band Manager framework for the 4.9 GHz Band, assign an overlay license to the Band Manager, and permit the Band Manager to enter into a sharing agreement with FirstNet, while protecting incumbent 4.9 GHz licensees. Allowing FirstNet to use the 4.9 GHz Band would give first responders who rely upon the nationwide public safety broadband network to access this critical mid-band spectrum for advanced technologies such as 5G, which will put new life-saving communications tools in the hands of first responders.

Federal support for modernizing public safety communications capabilities and ensuring access to FirstNet as a single, unified dedicated broadband network is essential to maintaining resilient, interoperable, and secure communications for all communities. By investing in NG9-1-1 and FirstNet, Congress will empower all first responders to carry out their missions more effectively and enhance public safety for all Americans.

Finally, as we work to upgrade the technologies relied upon by the public safety community, we must also recognize the critical importance of the people behind these lifesaving systems. Public safety telecommunicators – who answer 9-1-1 calls and coordinate emergency responses – are currently misclassified in the Office of Management and Budget's Standard Occupational Classification system as administrative professionals, rather than the more accurate "protective service occupation." Congress should pass legislation (the 9-1-1 SAVES Act, H.R. 637, in the House and the Enhancing First Response Act, S. 725, in the Senate) to federally reclassify these individuals, appropriately acknowledging their

skill, responsibility, and essential role in protecting our communities.

We thank you for your attention to these essential public safety matters and stand ready to partner with you in moving these important initiatives forward.

Sincerely,

Capt. Jack Varnado  
9-1-1 Director  
Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office

President  
APCO International



**Public Safety Communications in the United States**

Statement of

**Chief Steven A. Locke, CFO, EFO**

**First Vice President**

**International Association of Fire Chiefs**

*presented to the*

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
COMMUNICATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY**

*of the*

**COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE**

United States House of Representatives

September 9, 2025

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE CHIEFS  
8251 GREENSBORO DRIVE, SUITE 650 • MCLEAN, VA 22102

Good morning, Chairman Hudson, Vice Chairman Allen, Ranking Member Matsui, Chairman Guthrie, Vice Chairman Dunn and Ranking Member Pallone. I am Fire Chief Steven A. Locke, CFO, EFO, Fire Chief and Deputy City Manager of South Burlington, Vermont, and First Vice President of the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC). For over 150 years, the IAFC has been at the forefront of leading the charge to strengthen public safety communications. I appreciate the opportunity today to discuss the importance of effective public safety communications for fire and EMS departments' mission-critical lifesaving everyday work.

The IAFC represents the leadership of over 1.1 million firefighters and emergency responders. IAFC members are the world's leading experts in firefighting, emergency medical services, terrorism response, hazardous materials (hazmat) incidents, wildland fire suppression, natural disasters, search and rescue, and public-safety policy. Since 1873, the IAFC has provided a forum for its members to exchange ideas, develop best practices, participate in executive training, and discover diverse products and services available to first responders.

America's fire and emergency service is an all-hazards response force that is locally situated, staffed, trained, and equipped to respond to all types of emergencies. There are approximately 1.1 million men and women in the fire and emergency service – consisting of approximately 300,000 career firefighters and 800,000 volunteer firefighters – serving in over 30,000 fire departments around the nation. They are trained to respond to all hazards ranging from earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods to acts of terrorism, hazardous materials incidents, technical rescues, fires, and medical emergencies. We usually are the first at the scene of a disaster and the last to leave.

#### **The 1990s and 2000s: Public Safety's Communications Struggles Come to the Limelight**

The overall need for increased communication and collaboration between public safety tends to enter the spotlight during America's most trying times. At the end of the day, representatives of public safety, when they arrive at an incident scene, just want the ability to communicate with one another. Whether that be members of their same agency, a different agency from close by or far away, we realize that to fulfill our mission critical lifesaving work, we must be able to communicate with one another. Interoperability is the ability of emergency response providers and relevant government officials to communicate across jurisdictions, disciplines, and levels of government as needed and as authorized. The Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building bombing in Oklahoma City, OK was one of the first major disasters to highlight the struggles public safety has with interoperability. For example, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) activated 11 different urban search and rescue teams. During the response, handwritten notes were passed back and forth from the incident commanders to these FEMA teams.

September 11, 2001, saw the worst incident of terrorism that America has ever faced. Hundreds of first responders lost their lives that day due to, among several reasons, the lack of interoperability. In an effort to establish situational awareness, the New York Police Department (NYPD) had helicopters flying over the incident scene. It was evident that over time, that the structural worthiness of the twin towers was compromised. Yet, the NYPD had no means to radio into the Fire Department of New York's first responders who were heading up the tower in

the face of imminent danger. The 9/11 Commission identified the breakdown of communications between two agencies during its investigation of the tragic loss of life on that day.

It has now been twenty years since Hurricane Katrina made landfall and devastated numerous states in our Gulf Coast region. The storm surge witnessed on August 29, 2005, practically destroyed the coastal regions of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. In total, about 1,836 deaths spread out between seven states were left in this storm's wake. The response to Hurricane Katrina's aftermath was, and still is, unprecedented. It involved tens of thousands of people trying to save the stricken residents of the impacted states. However, the lack of interoperable communications was staggering. The sheer strength and veracity of this storm knocked out entire communications networks all together, not just a cell site or two. It is not difficult to draw a comparison between lack of a resilient, interoperable communications network and the loss of life. Thankfully, in 2012, the United States Congress provided a solution.

#### **Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network**

The above-mentioned incidents highlighted the need for first responders to have their own interoperable communications network, including broadband access for data. Regardless of whether they come from a local, state, federal or otherwise, when times get tough, public safety agencies needed a way to communicate with one another. Thus, the idea of a Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN) was conceived. In 2012, Congress passed the Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act (P.L. 112-96), which created the federal FirstNet Authority. Most importantly, for the first time ever, 20 MHz of radio spectrum was dedicated strictly for the use of public safety. The NPSBN uses what is known as the 700 MHz (Band 14) of radio spectrum. Because of this exclusive spectrum dedicated to public safety, the NPSBN is able to provide public safety with priority and ruthless preemption on their own dedicated spectrum.

For the NPSBN to be a success, it needed the states to support its development and deployment. After Congress passed the legislation, it either required the opt-in of all 56 states and territories of the United States, or each state and territory needed to stand up their own version of the NPSBN. Recognizing the importance of a truly national public safety communications system, the leadership of all 57 states and territories opted into the deployment of the NPSBN.

#### **Creation and Composition of the Federal FirstNet Authority**

As part of the 2012 enacting law for the NPSBN, Congress created the First Responder Network Authority (federal FirstNet Authority). This law created an independent federal agency and tasked it with ensuring that the management of the buildout and deployment of this network was done with proper coordination and oversight. The FirstNet Authority is essential to the overall operation of the NPSBN. One of its main responsibilities is to coordinate with local, state, tribal and federal stakeholders to ensure that the network being built for public safety was going to meet the needs of public safety. For example, fire, law enforcement, emergency medical services (EMS) and 9-1-1 call center personnel are represented on the FirstNet Authority Board. Additionally, the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) provides guidance about public

safety's needs and unique requirements. These groups are the backbone when it comes to governing the NPSBN.

The FirstNet Authority's Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) is composed of over 40 different representatives from various disciplines of public safety, combined with representatives of local, state, tribal, territorial, and federal agencies. This group represents the different facets of public safety who continuously provide feedback and suggestions about how to improve the NPSBN. The FirstNet PSAC ensures that the needs of the public safety end-users are being listened to, and the FirstNet Authority fulfills their mission. At the end of the day, due to this unique public-private partnership, the network operator is not in the driver's seat. Rather, it is public safety as represented by their delegates to the PSAC.

Another important group that contributes to the operations of FirstNet is the independent FirstNet Authority Board. They are also comprised of prominent leaders from not just in public safety, but they also represent local, state, tribal, and federal government entities. The IAFC is proud to have had numerous former Presidents and Board Chairs serve on the FirstNet Authority Board. Currently, our President and Board Chair, Fire Chief Trisha L. Wolford, who is the fire chief of Anne Arundel County in Maryland, serves on the FirstNet Authority Board. These select individuals, appointed by Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information work to ensure that the needs of public safety are fulfilled by the FirstNet Authority.

#### **Public Safety Features Unique to FirstNet**

Often, when disaster strikes, cellular communication networks can become overloaded both with public users on the scene trying to obtain information, and those from afar who are trying to obtain details. Downed power lines, damaged cell sites, or even possible complete loss of service also can result from a disaster. Before FirstNet, these issues plagued the public safety agencies' communications. Now, the FirstNet Authority supports a resilient network for reliable public safety communications during a disaster or emergency.

Priority access and ruthless preemption are two of the key tools first responders utilize to save lives. Due to FirstNet's unique set up, this means that public safety users and agencies have priority over commercial users on the network, which ensures that public safety's communications operations are not disturbed or throttled during emergencies. Ruthless preemption ensures that public safety communications are sent reliably during disasters and emergencies. Having this preemption feature always active and always ready for use by public safety is critical to our work. For priority and ruthless preemption to be successful for public safety, it requires a dedicated network core.

The FirstNet core supports the first and only nationwide system that ensures that public safety communications are prioritized and have ruthless preemption. This system ensures that commercial and public safety communications traffic stay separated. It also provides security, deterring bad actors from interfering with public safety communications. Updates to the core itself along with its infrastructure are driven by the FirstNet Authority Board and the PSAC. A standalone network core is key to delivering first responders the reliable communications that they deserve.

A benefit to the FirstNet Authority is the automatic oversight obligations. The current governance structure makes sure first responders sit at the head of the table when it comes to decision-making. For example, fire, law enforcement, EMS and 9-1-1 call center personnel are represented on the FirstNet Authority Board. Additionally, the PSAC provides guidance about public safety's needs and unique requirements. The end users are the ones driving the direction of this network. Also, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA); the Department of Commerce's Office of Inspector General (OIG); the Government Accountability Office; and Congress provide further oversight to ensure that FirstNet meets its goals – a level of oversight and accountability that no other carrier can claim. After a thorough open review process, in 2023, the Federal Communications Commission granted a license renewal to the FirstNet Authority for another 10 years.

Recently, the OIG released reports pointing to some areas of improvement in operations for the FirstNet Authority. The IAFC believes this is a necessary step in order to improve the FirstNet Authority's operations for public safety. Most importantly, the IAFC appreciates the OIG's work to ensure that the American taxpayers' hard-earned money is being used in a responsible manner.

#### **The End Users and Examples of FirstNet in Action**

The primary users of FirstNet are comprised of public safety representatives from the fire service, law enforcement, EMS, city managers, emergency managers, mayors, government officials, and even Members of Congress. A common misconception is that the NPSBN is just for first responders. Rather, it also supports an entire response ecosystem all tasked with serving the public in a disaster or emergency. Some examples of FirstNet's secondary users are hospitals and healthcare facilities, public utilities along with power linemen, colleges and universities, public and private schools. All of these facets of public safety now rely upon FirstNet to deliver interoperable communications.

Since the inception and deployment of the FirstNet Authority and the NPSBN, FirstNet has been on the scene to countless incidents. From a school shooting to wildfire response, from an 80,000+ attendee Taylor Swift concert to the communities and states affected by hurricanes, FirstNet stands at the ready to support public safety. The network also is supported by a dedicated fleet of various deployable assets which can be used to ensure FirstNet's operations when communications are down.

Here are some recent examples of major FirstNet asset deployments:

- Major wildfire responses, such as those experienced in Los Angeles, CA in early 2025 and New Mexico in 2024.
- Responding to the landfall and aftermath of Hurricanes Milton and Helene in 2024; Idalia in 2023; Ian in 2022; Ida in 2021; and Isaias, Laura, Sally, Delta, and Zeta in 2020.
- Sporadic tornado incidents like those experienced in St. Louis, Missouri in 2025; in Oklahoma in 2024; and Perryton, TX in 2023.

- Various winter storms like Blair and Cora in 2025.
- The 2023 solar eclipse event, which affected numerous states, counties, and cities. FirstNet's operations ensured that areas typically not visited by many citizens were ready to support any challenges they faced.

Short response times are essential when it comes to supporting 9-1-1 calls, especially those dealing with EMS. In 2023, the State of Tennessee became the first state to utilize FirstNet as a backup measure to supplement all of its 9-1-1 call dispatch centers. In 2024, the response to Hurricane Helene saw FirstNet being used to support North Carolina's 9-1-1 dispatch centers. In 2025, areas in Texas experiencing disaster due to flooding utilized FirstNet to support their 9-1-1 dispatch centers.

#### **Removal of the Sunset Provision for the FirstNet Authority**

One provision found within the FirstNet Authority's enacting statute is a sunset provision. This was inserted due to the uncertainty of the success of the NPSBN. When Congress created FirstNet, supporters and detractors were unsure of how many users would ultimately utilize these tools for public safety communications. Now, in 2025, those concerns no longer exist. Over 30,500 different public safety agencies utilize FirstNet and the NPSBN using over 1,000 unique devices and deployables that help enhance public safety communications.

In February 2022, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report, [Public-Safety Broadband Network: Congressional Action Required to Ensure Network Continuity \(GAO-22-104915\)](#). This report found that if Congress does not act, the continued operation of the NPSBN would be jeopardized and could result in significant disruption for first responders who rely on the network for emergency responses.

Congress must remove the sunset provision. If Congress does not remove the sunset date for the FirstNet Authority, the GAO reported that public safety may lose both its network and its ability to oversee the FirstNet network and guide its future evolution. In addition, innovation in public safety communications could be stifled if FirstNet's vendors decide network uncertainty is not worth them investing the time, money, and effort to develop new solutions for public safety communications. The following organizations all ask Congress to preserve the federal FirstNet Authority by removing the February 22, 2027, sunset date:

- International Association of Fire Chiefs
- National Fraternal Order of Police
- International Association of Chiefs of Police
- International Association of Fire Fighters
- National Volunteer Fire Council
- United States Conference of Mayors
- International Association of Emergency Managers
- Congressional Fire Services Institute
- National Emergency Management Association

- Major County Sheriffs of America
- National Fallen Firefighters Foundation
- National League of Cities
- National Association of Counties
- National Association of Black Law Enforcement Executives
- National Fire Protection Association
- National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians
- International City/County Management Association
- National Governors Association
- APCO International

#### **A Nationwide Transition to Next Generation 9-1-1 Services is Long Overdue**

The IAFC is proud to have been involved in the first ever 9-1-1 call in Haleyville, Alabama in February 1968. This event altered the future of public safety communications. As we have seen, technology has begun to surpass the capabilities of the services that legacy 9-1-1 systems provide. The majority of people with a cell phone can text, send pictures, transmit data, and use other means to communicate with one another. Yet, thousands of 9-1-1 centers across America do not have the ability to receive this information. Some even still rely upon technology from around the time that the first 9-1-1 call was made.

American citizens are sorely in need of support to help facilitate the nationwide transition to Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG 9-1-1). The IAFC asks that Congress pass comprehensive legislation to fund the nationwide NG 9-1-1 transition. The transition to NG 9-1-1 will allow fire and EMS departments to receive critical data, including location of a patient, video from a fire, or the details of a crash seamlessly from the people on scene. This transition will result in more effective responses to incidents with the goal of saving lives and providing better service.

#### **The Importance of Maintaining AM Radio in Vehicles**

Even with all the technological advancements that we have seen recently with public safety communications, redundancy is key. AM Radio continues to be a dependable means of alerting the public when threats are approaching their community. The resilience and simplicity of AM Radio cannot be understated. A proven example of the usefulness of AM radio was seen in 2024 in North Carolina during the landfall of Hurricane Helene. During this time, in Asheville, NC, AM radio operators from station WWNC stayed on the air to ensure their listeners and community stayed informed as the event unfolded. AM radio provided crucial evacuation and shelter information to citizens when other public communications networks were inoperable.

However, there has been a push from auto manufacturers to remove AM Radio from new vehicles as a free, standard service. Without a doubt, this action has the potential to hinder the delivery of lifesaving operations during times of crisis. As we saw in Asheville during Hurricane Helene, AM radio can be used to ensure that public safety communications do not have a single point of failure before, during, and after the storm. These brave heroic AM Radio operators also relayed information during the recovery phase, ensuring the public knew where to go for support. The AM Radio for Every Vehicle Act of 2025 (H.R. 979/S. 315) offers a commonsense solution.

We look forward to working with the House Energy and Commerce Committee to pass this legislation and ensure that the American public receive critical lifesaving information during major emergencies and disasters.

#### **Conclusion**

I sincerely thank you for the opportunity to address public safety communications in the United States. The IAFC, along with its many supporting organizations and associations, ask Congress to preserve the federal FirstNet Authority by removing the sunset date. FirstNet is the only service that can provide first responders with priority access and ruthless preemption, on its own dedicated network core with governance established by federal statute. No other telecommunications offering or network provides first responders with these mission critical life-saving tools.

We also ask Congress to take other steps to protect the public. For example, we look forward to working with the committee to pass legislation to upgrade the nation's 9-1-1 system by funding the nationwide transition to an interoperable NG 9-1-1 system. This upgrade will improve the emergency response that local public safety agencies provide to their citizens in need. We also ask Congress to pass commonsense legislation to retain AM radios in cars, so that Americans have access to lifesaving information during disasters and emergencies.

I thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for today's hearing. The IAFC looks forward to working with the committee to ensure that public safety has all the communications tools necessary, on their own dedicated network, with ruthless priority and preemption, on a dedicated core, with oversight in federal statute ensuring the FirstNet Authority can be the best it can be.



March 17, 2025

The Honorable Mike Johnson  
 Speaker  
 U.S. House of Representatives  
 H-232, The Capitol  
 Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Thune  
 Majority Leader  
 United States Senate  
 S-230, The Capitol  
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
 Minority Leader  
 U.S. House of Representatives  
 H-204, The Capitol  
 Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
 Minority Leader  
 United States Senate  
 S-221, The Capitol  
 Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Johnson, Leader Thune, Leader Jeffries and Leader Schumer:

The undersigned organizations and associations write to express our support for the removal of the sunset date for the FirstNet Authority. The FirstNet Authority manages and oversees the nationwide public safety broadband network, which is the only nationwide telecommunications broadband network built

exclusively for public safety. Our group represents various disciplines of public safety, including the fire service; law enforcement; emergency medical services; state and local emergency management; county and municipal leaders; and more. Our members utilize the products and services that FirstNet provides to help save lives. It is imperative that the lifesaving work of the FirstNet Authority last long into the future.

The idea of a nationwide public safety broadband network was born out of a recommendation from the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (“The 9/11 Commission”). On the day of America’s worst ever terrorist attack, many heroic first responders lost their lives due to not being able to communicate with one another. The lessons learned from that horrific day should never be forgotten. Since the release of the 9/11 Commission report, our organizations and associations have advocated for a network that ensures dedicated, prioritized, and reliable connectivity for all first responders: whenever and wherever they need it.

In 2012, Congress passed the Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act ([P.L. 112-96](#)), which created the FirstNet Authority. For the first time, 20 MHz of radio spectrum was assigned strictly for the use of public safety. This began the process of providing public safety with the tools they need to stay connected. The strong collaboration between government and industry ensures that the contracted needs of public safety are being met through a fully self-sustainable program. The law also created the FirstNet Authority’s Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC). The PSAC is comprised of leaders from all parts of public safety and state and municipal governments. The PSAC ensures that the needs of public safety are being met. If the FirstNet Authority were allowed to sunset, first responders would lose influence over the network that was built for them.

Since the creation of the FirstNet Authority, this program has helped front-line public safety personnel respond to numerous events affecting the everyday lives of American citizens. From large concerts, sporting events, and presidential inaugurations to hurricanes, wildfires, and other natural disasters, FirstNet has enabled critical connections among public safety personnel who have responded to calls for help. For example, FirstNet connected New Orleans responders when a terrorist stole the lives of innocent people in the French Quarter this past New Year’s Eve. It also enabled coordination among the 30 public safety agencies from multiple jurisdictions that responded when a commercial airliner and military helicopter collided in Washington, DC earlier this year. Public safety is committed to ensure continuation of FirstNet and an ability to respond effectively with the right resources, at the right time, in the right way to protect the homeland.

Within the law that created the FirstNet Authority lies a sunset provision. This sunset creates a very uncertain future for the national public safety broadband network and all the advances made in public safety communications since the FirstNet Authority was established. In February 2022, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report, [Public-Safety Broadband Network: Congressional Action Required to Ensure Network Continuity \(GAO-22-104915\)](#). This report found that if Congress does not act, the continued operation of the national public safety broadband network would be jeopardized and could result in significant disruption for first responders who rely on the network for emergency responses. This is unacceptable and we need the help of Congress to pass legislation during the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress to ensure this does not happen.

The organizations and associations below strongly support the removal of the sunset date for the FirstNet Authority and urge Congress to promptly enact this necessary change in 2025. This program has allowed our first responders to worry less about connectivity and focus more on their lifesaving missions. Public safety is already struggling with rising costs and staff turnover. If dedicated and reliable connectivity is one less thing we must worry about, then the result will be more lives saved. The FirstNet Authority must not be allowed to lapse and should have long-term certainty about its future.

Respectfully,

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)  
National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC)  
United States Conference of Mayors (USCM)  
International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM)  
Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI)  
National Emergency Management Association (NEMA)  
Major County Sheriffs of America (MCSA)  
National Fallen Firefighter Foundation (NFFF)  
National League of Cities (NLC)  
National Association of Counties (NACo)  
National Association of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)  
National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA)  
National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (NAEMT)  
International City/County Management Association (ICMA)

cc: The Honorable Brett Guthrie, Chairman, House Energy & Commerce Committee  
The Honorable Frank Pallone, Ranking Member, House Energy & Commerce Committee  
The Honorable Ted Cruz, Chairman, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation  
The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation

: sa



THE UNITED STATES  
CONFERENCE OF MAYORS



March 21, 2025

The Honorable Ted Cruz  
Chairman  
Committee on Commerce, Science,  
and Transportation  
United States Senate

The Honorable Brett Guthrie  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Commerce, Science,  
and Transportation  
United States Senate

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
United States House of Representatives

**RE: Reauthorization of First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet)**

Dear Mr. Cruz, Ms. Cantwell, Mr. Guthrie, and Mr. Pallone:

As a coalition of bipartisan membership organizations representing state legislatures, state chief information officers, mayors, cities, and counties, we write to express our support for the reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet). We urge Congress to permanently reauthorize FirstNet before its authorization sunsets in February 2027. FirstNet is a public policy triumph, providing broadband connections to over 27,000 state and local public safety agencies throughout the nation. It is critical that Congress act on legislation to eliminate the sunset clause for the agency in order to ensure that state and local first responders continue to have access to the interoperable, nationwide broadband communication network they fought so hard to secure.

The establishment of FirstNet was a direct response to the communication failures experienced during the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Since its inception, FirstNet has been indispensable in ensuring that our first responders have access to a nationwide, interoperable broadband network. This network is critical for providing first responders with the cost-effective connectivity they need to deliver effective public safety services. Without Congressional action, this program will expire in 2027, leaving first responders without the high-speed broadband network they need.

In addition, FirstNet has demonstrated its commitment by investing billions of dollars in federal funding to expanding rural broadband coverage, as required by Congress in the Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act. By leveraging existing infrastructure and prioritizing rural and underserved areas, FirstNet has significantly enhanced public safety connectivity for these communities.

Currently, FirstNet has over 6 million first responder subscribers across more than 27,000 public safety agencies. This extensive adoption is a testament to FirstNet's success in meeting first responder's need for high quality wireless broadband services. From natural disasters to human-caused emergencies, FirstNet has consistently demonstrated its capability to support our first responders in their mission to protect and serve our communities.

The reauthorization of FirstNet is critical to ensuring that our first responders continue to have access to this essential communication tool. We urge Congress to act swiftly to remove the sunset date for the FirstNet Authority, thereby guaranteeing the continuation of this system for years to come.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to your support in reauthorizing FirstNet and ensuring the continued success of this invaluable program.

Sincerely,



Tom Cochran  
CEO and Executive Director  
The United States Conference  
of Mayors



Clarence Anthony  
CEO and Executive Director  
National League of Cities



Matthew D. Chase  
Executive Director/CEO  
National Association of Counties



Tim Storey  
Executive Director  
National Conference of State  
Legislatures



Doug Robinson  
Executive Director  
National Association of Chief  
Information Officers



Julia Novak  
CEO/Executive Director  
International City/County  
Management Association

Cc: The United States House of Representatives  
The United States Senate



The Honorable Ted Cruz  
 Chairman  
 Senate Committee on  
 Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Brett Guthrie  
 Chairman  
 House Committee on  
 Energy and Commerce  
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
 Ranking Member  
 Senate Committee on  
 Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
 Ranking Member  
 House Committee on  
 Energy and Commerce  
 Washington, DC 20510

***RE: First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) – Support for Reauthorization and Sunset Removal***

Dear Senators Cruz and Cantwell, and Representatives Guthrie and Pallone:

On behalf of the New Hampshire Municipal Association (NHMA), the New Hampshire Association of Fire Chiefs (NHAFC) and New Hampshire Association of Chiefs of Police (NHACP), we respectfully urge the U.S. Congress to reauthorize the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) by removing the sunset provision currently set to take effect in February 2027 under the Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012. Without Congressional action, FirstNet’s statutory authority will expire in February 2027, placing a vital public safety asset at risk.

NHMA, NHAFC, and NHACP are nonprofit, nonpartisan, voluntary-membership organizations representing local government members. NHMA represents the interests of all 234 towns and cities in New Hampshire. NHAFC represents the interests of New Hampshire’s fire services to ensure that local fire departments have the proper resources to carry out their functions. NHACP represents the interests of New Hampshire’s law enforcement community in ensuring that local police departments have the proper resources to help ensure the public’s safety. Our organizations agree that ensuring the availability of reliable, interoperable communications for local emergency response is essential.

FirstNet was established in response to the communications challenges experienced during the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Since then, it has become an indispensable tool for local

governments and their public safety agencies. The nationwide broadband network provides first responders with priority and preemption capabilities during emergencies.

In New Hampshire, where our communities range from small rural towns to larger urban centers, reliable emergency communications are fundamental to public safety and disaster response. FirstNet's expansion into underserved and remote areas has helped fill longstanding gaps in coverage, allowing local responders to communicate and coordinate across jurisdictions when it matters most. Municipal leaders throughout the state value the stability and performance that FirstNet brings to law enforcement, fire services, and EMS.

Significantly, FirstNet was built through a public-private partnership model that not only ensured operational accountability but also leveraged existing infrastructure to expand coverage in hard-to-reach areas. New Hampshire municipalities have benefited from this approach, particularly in regions where broadband coverage had previously been unreliable. Continued expansion in underserved areas supports not only public safety but also community resilience and economic vitality.

Additionally, FirstNet operates under a governance structure that includes oversight by the FirstNet Board and input from the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC), ensuring that the voices of local public safety professionals are heard. NHMA and NHAFC support preserving this structure.

Allowing FirstNet's statutory authority to expire in 2027 would introduce uncertainty into local planning, funding, and technology deployment decisions. A clean reauthorization that simply removes the sunset clause would give municipalities the long-term confidence needed to invest in compatible systems, develop applications, and train personnel who depend on uninterrupted access to secure broadband communications.

We respectfully urge the U.S. Congress to take timely action to remove the sunset provision and permanently re-authorize the continued operation of the First Responder Network Authority. Doing so will sustain a vital component of our national public safety communications infrastructure and support the ongoing needs of New Hampshire's municipalities and their emergency services.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and supporting the communications needs of our first responders.

Sincerely,

Margaret Byrnes	Chief James Watkins	Chief Timothy Crowley
Executive Director	President	President
NH Municipal Association	NH Association of Fire Chiefs	NH Association of Police Chiefs

cc: New Hampshire's Federal Delegation



September 9, 2025

The Honorable Brett Guthrie  
 Chair, Committee on Energy and  
 Energy Commerce

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
 Ranking Member, Committee on  
 and Commerce

The Honorable Richard Hudson  
 Chair, Subcommittee on Communications  
 and Technology

The Honorable Doris Matsui  
 Ranking Member, Subcommittee on  
 Communications and Technology

Dear Representatives Guthrie, Pallone, Hudson, and Matsui,

On behalf of the Public Safety Next Generation 9-1-1 Coalition, we thank you for your continued leadership and commitment to public safety communications. As you consider ways to strengthen the nation's public safety communications systems during today's hearing, we respectfully highlight the national security imperative of modernizing our nation's decades-old 9-1-1 systems to Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1).

Last Congress, we welcomed House Energy and Commerce Committee passage of H.R. 3565, the Spectrum Auction Reauthorization Act by unanimous consent, which included funding to establish a nationwide NG9-1-1 federal grant program, consistent with our Coalition's core principles. We were pleased to have strong bipartisan support for the bill, as well as the support of all major national public safety associations and key industry stakeholders.

We now turn to your leadership to request action in this Congress. We ask you to ensure that NG9-1-1 is deployed in a fully interoperable, comprehensive, secure, innovative, and reliable manner throughout the country, ensuring no community is left behind and that all Americans can trust that when they call 9-1-1, help will arrive promptly, supported by advanced and reliable technology.

Federal support for NG9-1-1 remains an urgent need. Today's 9-1-1 systems are based largely on technology from the 1960s and 70s, lagging behind the advanced communications capabilities commercially available to the public and leaving networks vulnerable to cyberattacks and natural disasters. A member of the public can instantly send a photo or video to friends and family, yet is often limited to voice communications when calling 9-1-1. Modernizing our 9-1-1 networks is also a national security imperative. As the central point for emergency response, 9-1-1 is a prime target for criminals and bad actors.

With more than 240 million 9-1-1 calls each year, deploying NG9-1-1 is one of the most impactful investments Congress can make in public safety. Every day that passes means 9-1-1 professionals and emergency responders lack the advanced communications tools and cybersecurity resources they need to best protect life and property. NG9-1-1 will begin saving lives in our communities the moment it is deployed.

Public Safety Next Generation 9-1-1 Coalition  
[www.ng-911coalition.org](http://www.ng-911coalition.org)

With your assistance, we can lead the world in implementing an advanced and effective emergency response capability, from local emergencies to large-scale disasters, that will protect our communities and save the lives of the public and first responders. We urge you to prioritize federal support for NG9-1-1 this Congress to ensure that every community benefits from secure, resilient, and modern emergency communications. The Public Safety NG9-1-1 Coalition stands ready to work with you in a bipartisan manner to achieve this national security and public safety imperative.

Thank you. Please direct any inquiries to Mel Maier, spokesman for the Coalition, at [maierm@apcointl.org](mailto:maierm@apcointl.org).

Sincerely,

Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials–International  
Congressional Fire Services Institute  
Fraternal Order of Police  
International Association of Chiefs of Police  
International Association of Fire Chiefs  
Major Cities Chiefs Association  
Major County Sheriffs of America  
Metropolitan Fire Chiefs Association  
National Association of State EMS Officials  
National Sheriffs' Association  
National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives



July 28, 2025

The Honorable Ted Cruz  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on  
Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Brett Guthrie  
Chairman  
House Committee on  
Energy and Commerce  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on  
Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Pallone  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on  
Energy and Commerce  
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Reauthorization of FirstNet

Dear Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, Chairman Guthrie, and Ranking Member Pallone:

The Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns, representing all 39 municipalities in the Ocean State, writes to express its support for congressional reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) by eliminating the 2027 sunset provision contained in the Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012.

FirstNet has provided Rhode Island's local governments with a dependable and secure broadband platform built for emergency response. As a statewide alliance of municipal leaders, we know that consistent, interoperable communications are the backbone of effective public safety and emergency coordination whether the incident is a coastal storm, mass gathering, or local infrastructure failure.

The creation of FirstNet in 2012 addressed one of the most critical gaps identified in the 9/11 Commission Report: the inability of first responders to communicate across jurisdictions during large-scale emergencies. Since then, FirstNet has grown to support more than 30,000 public safety agencies and 7 million users nationwide. In Rhode Island, municipal police, fire, and EMS personnel have adopted the platform and rely on it for daily operations as well as large-scale incidents.

FirstNet's statutory commitment to rural and underserved areas has particular relevance here in Rhode Island, where small coastal and inland towns must maintain readiness for weather events, power outages, and transportation disruptions. FirstNet provides these communities with the communications continuity they need to prepare, respond, and recover.

The current sunset date creates uncertainty for our member communities as they plan for long-term technology upgrades, and integration of FirstNet-compatible equipment. Municipalities benefit from policy stability. Congress can ensure that stability by removing the 2027 sunset and affirming the long-term availability of the network.





We thank you for your consideration and your commitment to ensuring that local governments have the tools they need to serve their communities with professionalism and preparedness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. R. Rossi".

Randy R. Rossi  
Executive Director

cc: Rhode Island Congressional Delegation



PATRICK YOES  
National President

9 SEPTEMBER 2025

JIM PASCO  
Executive Director



## FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE

Testimony of  
**Patrick Yoes**  
National President  
Fraternal Order of Police

“Public Safety Communications in the United States”

before the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology of the  
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Matsui, and the other Members of this distinguished Subcommittee. I thank you for the chance to submit this testimony for the record on the state of public safety communications and the urgent need to reauthorize the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet).

The Fraternal Order of Police is the oldest and largest law enforcement labor organization in the United States, representing more than 382,000 members in over 2,200 local lodges in every region of the country. We represent rank-and-file law enforcement officers who serve in departments of all sizes—from small rural agencies to large urban departments. Our members are on the front lines every day, protecting our communities and relying on effective, reliable communications to do their jobs safely and effectively.

Public safety communications are the lifeline for law enforcement officers, firefighters, EMS personnel, and other first responders. In an emergency, seconds matter, and the ability to communicate seamlessly—whether coordinating a response to a natural disaster, a mass casualty event, or an active threat—can mean the difference between life and death. Our members depend on these systems not just for operational success, but for their personal safety and the safety of the public we serve.

I know this from personal experience. Just over twenty years ago, I was working as a Deputy Sheriff with the St. Charles Parish Sheriff's Office and I was among the thousands of law enforcement officers and emergency responders who prepared for and responded to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. I authored a book about my experiences entitled *Chest Deep and Rising, The Hurricane Katrina Nightmare*.

While no communications network could be expected to remain fully operational in such extreme conditions, responders like me were operating in an environment in which the communications infrastructure was crippled; repeater sites were incapacitated by floodwaters, structural failures, and extended power outages which rendered nearly all communications tools inoperable at a time when the need was the greatest.

Fifty-two 911 communications networks were disrupted, and in many cases, communications centers had to be evacuated due to flooding. Vast areas of the affected region had no regular telephone or wireless service. Thousands of the switches and cell towers, which form the region's telecommunications network, were destroyed, inaccessible or left without power. For some agencies, the only means of communication for the first weeks was by personal couriers, which proved impractical due to the level of devastation and flooding that hampered movement. The inability to communicate only compounded the challenges facing first responders. These factors impeded our ability to quickly respond to and subsequently aid the people who needed our help the most during this massive natural disaster.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and while I was serving as the FOP National Secretary, I was invited by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to serve as a member of the *Independent Panel Reviewing the Impact of Hurricane Katrina on*

*Communications Networks.* As part of my work on that panel, I submitted a report from the law enforcement perspective which can be found [here](#).

Among the issues I outlined were interoperability, the community's lack of access to media outlets to convey accurate information to the public, and insufficient satellite coverage. My recommendations—all made in 2006—included the necessity of training in emergency communications, a credentialing program for technicians working to restore networks in restricted areas, and the need for the assignment of portable communications equipment like mobile towers and antennas.

While we have improved these systems in the last two decades, many aspects of our nation's public safety communications infrastructure remain outdated, vulnerable, and insufficient to meet modern challenges.

Since 1997, the FOP has been an active and reliable partner to the Federal government and to the private sector to find solutions. We have played a leadership role going back to the days of Cyren Call and the Public Safety Spectrum Trust—the ancestors of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) and will continue to do so.

I want to commend recent actions by the FCC that have advanced public safety communications. Last year, the FCC made a landmark decision to authorize the use of the 4.9 GHz spectrum band within the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN) and grant a nationwide license to FirstNet to administer it. This was a hard-fought victory for public safety over private profit. The FOP, along with our partners at the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), campaigned vigorously to protect this dedicated spectrum from encroachment by for-profit companies, critical infrastructure operators, and transportation providers who sought to use it for commercial purposes under the guise of "local control." A fractured, patchwork approach would have lacked the economies of scale needed to drive innovation, leading to underutilization and leaving vast areas of the country—particularly rural communities—unserved. Instead, by integrating the 4.9 GHz band into the NPSBN, FirstNet can now deploy advanced 5G capabilities nationwide, providing public safety with the speed, capacity, and propagation characteristics essential for innovative tools like real-time video sharing, sensor data from wearables, and enhanced location services during emergencies.

This decision underscores the proven success of FirstNet as a public-private partnership dedicated exclusively to public safety. Since its establishment, FirstNet has built and operated a nationwide broadband network that prioritizes first responders, ensuring priority and preemption over commercial traffic. Our members have seen firsthand how FirstNet enhances officer safety and response efficiency, and law enforcement plays a direct role in its governance through the FirstNet Authority Board and Public Safety Advisory Committee. The FOP is grateful to former FCC Chairman Jessica Rosenworcel and current FCC Chairman Brendan Carr for engaging with us and prioritizing the voices of rank-and-file officers in this process. Moving forward, we

look to FirstNet to continue protecting incumbent licensees, coordinating frequencies to avoid interference, and driving expeditious 5G deployment using existing infrastructure.

Interoperability is still a critical issue. Despite advances like FirstNet, challenges persist, as evidenced by reports from the assassination attempt on then-former President Trump last year, where communication gaps between the U.S. Secret Service (USSS) and other law enforcement personnel providing protection at the event may have played a role in the security failures that day. Notably, not all Federal law enforcement agencies, of which the USSS is one, fully utilize FirstNet, which exacerbates these problems. The FCC can help by promoting awareness of 5G benefits on the 4.9 GHz band and combating efforts by commercial entities to dilute public safety priorities. Additionally, the FCC's Industry Traceback Group (ITG) plays a vital role in addressing caller ID spoofing, which fuels dangerous "swatting" incidents that endanger officers and waste resources. We encourage stronger collaboration between the ITG, voice service providers, and law enforcement at all levels to trace and prosecute offenders, even when calls are spoofed. Recently, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has distributed [new resources](#) for "swatting" and hoax threats—which are on the rise again nationwide.

Swatting and spoofing are among the evolving threats and technologies we have to anticipate, as we transition to digital and 5G networks. Protecting these networks from hostile actors—through robust cybersecurity and resilient infrastructure—is critically important. And what comes after 5G? Advances in 6G and beyond will likely be driven by integrating artificial intelligence (AI), edge computing, and expanded spectrum access. This should enable even more sophisticated tools for public safety, such as predictive analytics for threat detection and augmented reality for training. Law enforcement must be at the table to ensure these developments prioritize our needs.

This brings me to the main point of my testimony—the need to reauthorize FirstNet. First and foremost, we agree with the Commission's order that preserves the 4.9 GHz band for public safety, requires priority and preemption over any non-public safety use, and adopts a nationwide framework to support public safety's growing need for dedicated 5G spectrum. This cannot be effectively or realistically accomplished through a fractured, patchwork approach that results in different uses of the band depending upon the geographic area, or even upon the licensee within the same geographic area. This decentralized framework has been in place for 20 years, and the band has remained chronically underutilized. The fact is that for-profit companies in the private sector, critical infrastructure operators, and transportation providers seek to encroach upon public safety's 4.9 GHz spectrum for their own commercial purposes. These efforts are unacceptable to our members whose lives literally depend on the reliability of these communications systems. Organizations like the Coalition for Emergency Response and Critical Infrastructure (CERCI), which represent commercial interests, are making this argument under the false banner of "local control." This approach will not work and the lack of a national strategy could result in commercial entities "cherry-picking" the most desirable areas for 5G investment, while leaving much of the country unserved.

When the FirstNet effort was still taking shape, the FOP and our partners in the International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), who together represent the overwhelming majority of the public safety practitioners that use this equipment in the field, were slowly squeezed out of the policy-making process in favor of providers, big technology representatives, and public safety executives. Law enforcement was barely represented and there were no rank-and-file voices at the table at all. This led the FOP and IAFF to oppose those early efforts, and we risk repeating history if law enforcement officers—the rank-and-file whose lives depend on a healthy and robust public safety communications network—are once again sidelined. While we certainly welcome and appreciate the broad support that law enforcement executive organizations representing chiefs and sheriffs have provided to FirstNet, it is the men and women in the field whose lives are on the line.

The FOP has a representative on FirstNet's Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC), which ensures that the needs of public safety are being met. We have a long history of partnership and collaboration to provide our officers in the field. The FOP has confidence in FirstNet, which is one of the reasons we are pushing Congress to reauthorize the program. More importantly, our members who depend on FirstNet have confidence in their communication systems—and it is their lives that are at stake.

The fact is that FirstNet has a decades-long record of success. They have a high-functioning and established relationship with the field and the FOP that has resulted in an ongoing legacy of trust and collaboration. When we need to talk, they listen. When we have a concern, it is addressed. When we have a problem, it is solved.

The FirstNet Authority's authorization is set to expire in February 2027, and without Congressional action, law enforcement officers like those represented by the FOP could lose access to a dedicated, reliable broadband system that has proven its value in real-world scenarios, from hurricanes to active shooter events. Reauthorizing FirstNet—ideally on a permanent basis—will ensure continuity, allow for ongoing investment in 5G and future technologies, and guarantee that public safety remains the priority.

On behalf of our more than 382,000 members, I thank you again for the opportunity to share the perspective of the Fraternal Order of Police with the Members of this subcommittee.



Statement for the Record

Hearing on Public Safety Communications in the United States

Before the House Energy and Commerce Committee  
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology

September 9, 2025

For more information:

Brian Davenport, Chief Strategy Officer, Intrado Life & Safety  
[bdavenport@intrado.com](mailto:bdavenport@intrado.com)

Intrado Life & Safety, the nation's leading 9-1-1 provider, thanks the leadership and members of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee for Communications and Technology for holding this important hearing titled, "Public Safety Communications in the United States."

Intrado's mission, since our founding nearly 50 years ago, has always been to save lives and protect communities by helping them prepare for, respond to, and recover from critical events. We are in a unique position in the 9-1-1 ecosystem — standing at the intersection of emergency communications and serving communications providers, state and local public safety agencies, and first responders to ensure the right help reaches the right place quickly.

240 million calls are placed to 9-1-1 every year in the United States. The network that supports these requests for assistance is the backbone of our public safety and, by extension, our national security systems. But our 9-1-1 network is at a crisis point, still running in many parts of the country on antiquated technology that can no longer be patched. It is also under constant threat by bad actors—both domestic and abroad—who want to cause harm by disrupting, destabilizing, and striking our 9-1-1 system. This impacts not only the safety of the public but also our national security.

Next Generation 9-1-1, or NG9-1-1, is a modern emergency response system that incorporates digital and internet-based technologies over an IP-based network. It expands emergency communications beyond the core functionality of the original legacy 9-1-1 system that dates back to the 1960s. It also leverages the enhanced capabilities of IP-based devices and networks and provides end-to-end cybersecurity protections that help thwart attempts to disrupt our public safety networks.

The Federal Communications Commission's July 2024 order establishing a nationwide framework for NG9-1-1 provides needed structure and clarity for state 9-1-1 authorities, localities, and communications providers alike. Under this framework, the transition process is initiated by a state or local entity, which means that funding at the state or local level is a gating factor to moving forward.

Several states and localities are leading the way in the transition – such as North Carolina and Connecticut -- but other parts of the country are in very early stages or have yet to begin. The practical impact is that our nation's 9-1-1 system is currently a patchwork. With communities and jurisdictions at different stages in the process, those that have upgraded to NG9-1-1 must still remain connected to the end-of-life legacy system. This patchwork creates undesirable complexity as well as a cyber-attack surface that is far too broad, far too enticing for bad actors, and far too risky for 9-1-1 authorities and our national security.

NG9-1-1 networks also make it possible to leverage advanced wireless technologies, such as those provided by FirstNet. Public Safety Answering Points are Primary Users on FirstNet, meaning they receive priority and preemptive treatment, and some states – notably Iowa and Tennessee -- have implemented statewide FirstNet wireless backup for their 9-1-1 systems. This backup connectivity can increase access and reliability for PSAPs, even during

network congestion and natural or manmade disasters. We view these capabilities as vital to a strong 9-1-1 system nationwide. As the committee also considers FirstNet Authority Reauthorization, we encourage the committee to provide the public safety community with certainty and assurance that this essential communications resource will continue without lapse and to support the continued success of the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network.

Our networks are only as secure as their weakest link. To ensure our national security and public safety networks are protected from those who wish to cause harm on our homeland by disrupting our ability to provide help to Americans when crisis strikes, we urge Congress to fully fund NG9-1-1.

We are grateful to you and the Subcommittee for holding this hearing and for your commitment to this nation's public safety and national security. We are hopeful our statement will shine a light on the critical need for fully funding NG9-1-1 and the benefits it promises.

NORMA J. TORRES  
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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEES:  
STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS, AND RELATED PROGRAMS  
TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT,  
AND RELATED AGENCIES  
COMMITTEE ON HOUSE ADMINISTRATION  
SUBCOMMITTEES:  
MODERNIZATION, RANKING MEMBER

September 9, 2025

Chairman Brett Guthrie  
Energy and Commerce Committee  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Energy and Commerce Committee  
2107 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Guthrie and Ranking Member Pallone:

As a former 911 dispatcher for more than 17 years, I know that public safety telecommunicators are critical links in our emergency response system. 911 telecommunicators do far more than simply answer a phone and send for help. When Americans are experiencing the worst, most life-threatening moments of their lives, 9-1-1 dispatchers answer the call – they are true first responders. Dispatchers work during life-or-death situations and on any given day might direct police to a crime that is in progress, provide lifesaving first aid, or speak to a caller on the brink of suicide. I commend you and the entire subcommittee for focusing on this critical part of our emergency response system and I urge the Committee to prioritize legislation and oversight work that strengthens our 911 systems, from reliable technology to programs that support and sustain our 911 telecommunicators, allowing the 911 community to support America during its most desperate and dangerous moments.

No American should call 911 only for the call to go unanswered, whether from technical failure or insufficient personnel. Unfortunately, I have spoken with 911 telecommunicators across the country who detail cyber-attacks shutting down centers, staffing shortages leaving unacceptably long wait times, and inconsistent training that leaves dispatchers unprepared for evolving threats.

America's 911 system needs reliable Next Generation 911 technology (NEXTGEN 911) to remain secure and responsive in our moments of greatest need. [I urge the Committee to prioritize NEXTGEN 911 funding.](#) Without this critical funding, our 911 centers rely on old and outdated technology, susceptible to cyber attacks and unable to handle the new data available to help track and locate Americans who call, text, or video call 911 in need of help. Cell phone service providers must meet the legal standards around this technology as well, sharing critical location information to 911 centers to help emergency services respond as fast as possible.

Additionally, as we transition to NEXTGEN 911 systems with advanced IP-based technologies, the need for properly trained and supported telecommunicators becomes even more critical. These sophisticated systems require dispatchers who understand not just how to answer calls, but how to manage complex data streams, coordinate with multiple agencies through integrated platforms, and adapt to rapidly evolving protocols. This is why I support federal training grants through the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to provide necessary and appropriate training for 911 centers. Today, as this Committee examines public safety communications challenges, we must recognize that the 911 system's effectiveness depends on having properly trained, supported, and classified telecommunicators at the heart of these critical communications networks. Proper training transforms 911 operators into vital witnesses in criminal investigations, ensuring they can accurately document critical details and maintain chain of custody for evidence. It also allows 911 operators to provide accurate time sensitive medical advice, such as helping with births. Moreover, while technology provides powerful tools for cybersecurity, the human element remains our first and often most effective line of defense against cyber threats—trained dispatchers who can identify suspicious activity and respond appropriately when systems are compromised.

While my 9-1-1 SAVES Act—which reclassifies 9-1-1 professionals as first responders at the federal level—falls under different congressional jurisdiction, the training and technology challenges it addresses are directly relevant to this Committee's oversight of public safety communications. I thank so many police, fire, 911, and other public safety groups across the nation for their support of this bill, including two witnesses at this hearing: Dr. Brian Fontes (Former CEO of NENA) and Sheriff Shannon Dicus (San Bernardino County). The lack of across-the-board standards when it comes to 911 dispatcher training requirements prevents workers from being on the same page and undermines the effectiveness of the communications systems this Committee oversees. Training standards differ dramatically by jurisdiction, where one area might require dozens of hours of one-on-one training, versus another that only requires a few hours. This inconsistency in training standards creates unacceptable safety risks and prevents dispatchers from effectively utilizing the advanced communications technologies and cybersecurity protocols that fall squarely within this Committee's jurisdiction.

These differences can create unacceptable safety risks for the public. The effectiveness of our entire emergency response system depends on skilled telecommunicators who can properly assess situations, coordinate multi-agency responses, and provide critical instructions to callers. Without standardized training requirements, we cannot ensure that Americans receive consistent, professional emergency communications services regardless of their location. When citizens face life-threatening emergencies, they deserve confidence that the telecommunicator responding to their call has received comprehensive, standardized training to effectively coordinate their rescue and provide appropriate guidance during their most vulnerable moments.

My 17 years behind the headset taught me that in those critical moments when someone dials 911, the technology is only as effective as the professional using it. As we deploy Next Generation 911 systems across the country, this truth becomes even more important. Whether it is managing multimedia emergency data, coordinating real-time information sharing between

agencies, or utilizing advanced location services, today's dispatchers need consistent, federally-supported training to effectively operate these life-saving technologies. The challenges facing America's public safety communications system require both technological innovation and workforce investment. As this Committee continues its vital oversight work, I urge you to remember that our most sophisticated networks are only as strong as the professionals who operate them. By supporting legislation like the NEXTGEN 911 Act and the 911 SAVES Act and ensuring adequate federal investment in training and technology, we can build a 911 system that serves the Americans who depend on it in their darkest hours.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Norma J. Torres". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "N".

Norma J. Torres  
Member of Congress

## 9/11's failures led to a first-responder network — which will vanish if Congress doesn't act

By

[Ray Kelly](#)

Published Sep. 8, 2025, 7:00 a.m. ET

6 Comments

The video player is currently playing an ad.

Sept. 11, 2001, was a day of unspeakable tragedy.

Twenty-four years later, the images of the World Trade Center in flames still burn fresh in the minds of those who watched from afar and those who experienced it up close.

But amidst the chaos was a group of heroes — firefighters, police officers, paramedics and countless others — who ran toward the danger, risking their lives to save the lives of others.

They were our first responders, and in the face of death, they showed unwavering courage.

What many Americans didn't see that day were the communication failures that made an already-impossible job even harder for these first responders.

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On Sept. 11, 2001, first responders had to pass pieces of paper around Ground Zero to communicate. Matthew McDermott for NY Post

Radios failed. Phone lines jammed.

Agencies from different states couldn't coordinate effectively, resulting in first responders having to pass notes on pieces of paper around Ground Zero and the Pentagon to communicate.

Brave men and women entered the towers without any idea of what they were walking into because there was no way to talk to each other.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology even identified this as a factor in the deaths of 343 firefighters who couldn't evacuate the World Trade Center.

Those failures were not abstract; they were personal.

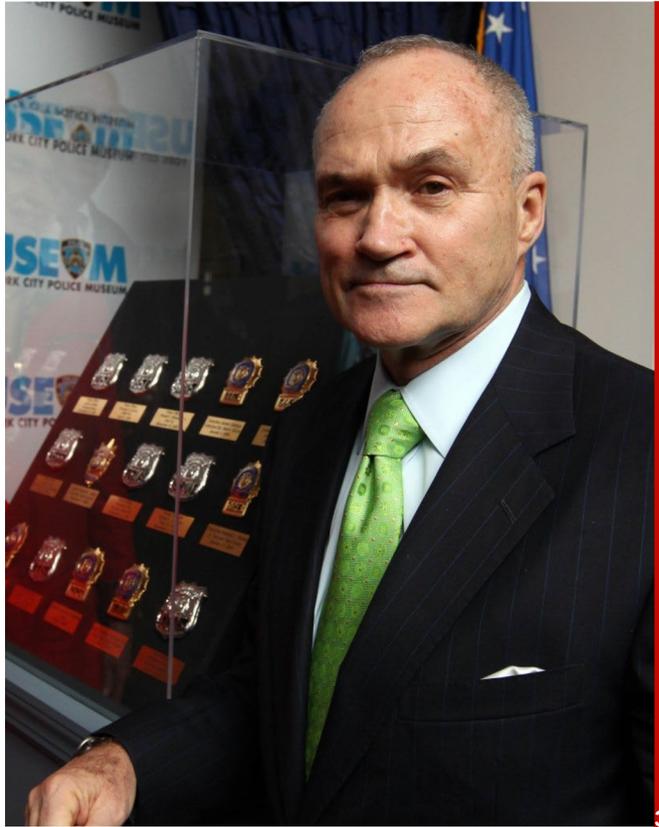
Mayor Michael Bloomberg asked me to return as police commissioner following 9/11 to respond, rebuild and ensure America and New York were prepared.

I spoke to the families of men and women who never made it home, and I promised them their loved ones' sacrifices would not be in vain.

We owed them more than gratitude. We owed them solutions.

That is why, years later, I was heartened to see Congress take decisive action to make certain this never happens again.

Yet now that effort is in danger of being derailed.



Longest-serving NYPD Commissioner Ray Kelly stands beside replica badges of officers who fell Sept. 11, 2001, at the New York Police Museum in 2010. Chad Rachman/New York Post

The First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) finally became reality in 2017, during the first Trump administration.

For the first time in American history, first responders were given a communication network built specifically for them — the men and women who put on a uniform and charge head-on into danger while the rest of us can find safety.

A lot has changed in public safety since I made my first arrest in 1967.

Technology has revolutionized response communication in both everyday service and in times of crisis.

FirstNet ensures that during a hurricane, wildfire, mass shooting or terrorist attack, firefighters and EMTs can coordinate search and rescue, and police can communicate across jurisdictions in real time.

It's what keeps lines open when commercial networks crash under pressure.

It recently helped first responders remain connected during Texas Hill Country's devastating [flash floods](#) over the July Fourth weekend and continues to support the recovery efforts today.

Unlike commercial providers, FirstNet gives first responders an always-on priority and preemption.

Their calls and data go through first, no matter what.

It operates on a dedicated spectrum that serves more than 30,000 public-safety agencies and departments across the country.

Over the life of its contract, AT&T will return [\\$18 billion](#) back into the network to keep it strong.

And *all of it* is done without a dime of [taxpayer money](#).

FirstNet represents responsible governance and a major victory for American strength: a government that empowers private enterprise to solve big problems without expanding the federal budget.

A vision where our heroes have what they need to save lives.



FirstNet helped first responders stay connected during Texas Hill Country's terrible flash floods July Fourth weekend. AFP via Getty Images

But FirstNet's authorization is set to [expire](#) in 2027.

If Congress fails to act, we risk turning our backs on the people who rushed into the World Trade Center 24 years ago and those who respond to today's emergencies, armed with courage and a network they can trust.

The House Energy and Commerce Committee just announced a Tuesday subcommittee hearing on the issue.

Reauthorizing FirstNet is supported by the very people who use it: the National Fraternal Order of Police, the International Association of Fire Fighters, the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

These are not partisan voices. These are Americans who know what failure looks like and what success feels like because they've lived both.

Not only that, FirstNet's reauthorization honors the sacrifice of 9/11's heroes and ensures future generations of first responders never face the same communication breakdowns.

It is a chance for Congress, and for President Trump, to double down on a vision that saves lives and strengthens America so that families may feel more secure in their communities.

I can say confidently that FirstNet stands as one of the most consequential and forward-looking investments in public safety this nation has ever seen.

On 9/11, we asked first responders to do the impossible, and they fearlessly put their lives on the line to do so.

Now, we can provide them with the tools to help make good on our vow never to let a tragedy like that happen again.

Let's get it done.

*Ray Kelly is the longest-serving NYPD commissioner, leading from 1992 to 1994 and from 2002 to 2013*

**Testimony of  
Steven K. Newton  
Emergency Management Director  
Chatham County, NC**

**Responses to Additional Questions for the Record for the  
United States House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Communications & Technology**

**Public Safety Communications in the United States**

**Submitted Wednesday, October 8, 2025**

Additional Questions for the Record

**The Honorable August Pfluger**

1. **Mr. Newton, in the hearing we discussed difficulties in reaching rural communities and adding space-based mobile broadband through carriers to the Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) system, can you expand upon your comments on the need to incorporate this technology into the WEA system and how it could bolster emergency preparedness in the lead up to a natural disaster?**

Leveraging space-based mobile broadband for WEA alerts promises to sustain the ability to alert populations in harm's way even when traditional communications infrastructure is inoperable or intermittently operable. Wildfires, flooding, high winds, landslides, ice, and even debris clearing activities may damage wireless and broadband infrastructure. When faced with disasters that result in widespread electrical, Internet, and infrastructure damage, local or regional cellular service may be out for days or weeks. By creating new pathways to reach consumer devices, space-based mobile broadband ensures our alerting capability despite extended recovery times on the ground.

2. **Amateur radio, also known as ham radio, proved to be a critical communication lifeline in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene, especially in areas where conventional networks failed due to extensive power outages and infrastructure damage. Can you describe specific instances during Helene where amateur radio operators bridged communication gaps for emergency agencies, relayed messages for disaster victims, or supported coordination of rescue and relief operations?**

Amateur radio provided critical communications links immediately after Hurricane Helene, both through formal and informal . Two prominent examples of bridging communications gaps include amateur radio operators Dan Gitro (K2DMG) and Van Lee (KM4TC), who both spontaneously volunteered to relay critical emergency messages, event

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details, and availability of supplies to impacted residents. They communicated through predominantly privately maintained amateur radio repeaters or directly with others over High Frequency (HF) radio from Johnston County, NC. Amateur radio operators also worked side-by-side with emergency managers and first responders in local and regional Emergency Operations Centers (EOC). Amateur radio operator volunteers also worked side-by-side with state and local emergency management offices to coordinate amateur radio personnel and resources in the affected areas.

- a. Barriers such as regulatory restrictions can impede amateur radio operators' ability to provide timely assistance during disasters. Would the passage of legislation like the Amateur Radio Emergency Preparedness Act, or similar efforts to remove such barriers, help strengthen our region's emergency communications and disaster response capabilities?**

Passage of the Amateur Radio Emergency Preparedness Act, and other legislation protecting rights of amateur radio operators, will strengthen emergency communications and disaster response capabilities across the nation. The amateur radio community remains a relevant and valued resource, especially during disasters. They are used as a force multiplier for local emergency managers, a source of real-time situational awareness, and a robust and redundant means for residents and public safety to remain connected. This capacity is dependent, however, on the availability of licensed volunteers, trained to perform specific tasks, operating radio equipment whose performance is significantly impacted by antenna placement. Legislation guaranteeing the right to install exterior radio antennas will improve operating conditions for existing amateur radio operators we depend on, and also encourages participation in the hobby for the next generation of "Hams."

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**The Honorable Russ Fulcher**

- 1. Do you face any reception or data send/receive interruptions or delays due to the inability of wireless and broadband providers from deploying equipment on federal lands that may be adjacent to state, local, or private lands in more rural areas?**

I experienced reception and data send/receive interruptions and delays while training or responding on or adjacent to federal lands including Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests in North Carolina, El Yunque National Forest in Puerto Rico, and Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park on Hawai'i Island. It is not unusual to experience degraded wireless and broadband service in communities adjacent to federal lands as locations which are ideal with regards to radio frequency (RF) propagation are often the protected land. This results in less ideal locations and equipment being deployed which sacrifice coverage, capacity, or both.

- 2. Have you heard of problems due to the inability to locate towers, generating stations, or other equipment that are causing such interruptions or delays?**

I am not aware of specific incidents, but based on my experience it is not difficult to imagine the lack of cellular infrastructure, regardless of the reason, would cause interruptions and delays. Without effective wireless or broadband coverage, Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) are not reliable or timely, in-vehicle public safety systems such as mobile Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) cannot update, and responder accountability and tracking systems are likely ineffective without temporary deployables.

**San Bernardino County Sheriff Shannon Dicus' Responses to  
Rep. Fulcher's Additional Questions for the Record**

- 1. Like several counties in Idaho, San Bernardino County covers a large geographic area that includes rural areas where cellular coverage for public safety can get spotty. Sheriffs have told me they experience challenges with service losses and interoperability challenges across large geographic areas they must cover. Since AT&T has built out its network per the requirement and with others like Verizon Wireless and T-Mobile having joined the public safety communications space, are there things we can do in Congress to make it easier for sheriffs and other local public safety entities to ensure you obtain consistent coverage across large geographic areas?**

Representative Fulcher, San Bernardino County is the largest county in the nation, covering more than 20,000 square miles of mountains, deserts, and vast rural areas. No single carrier or system can guarantee complete coverage across that kind of geography. That's why our deputies operate with multiple overlapping systems. Their in-car computers carry both FirstNet and Verizon cards, so if one network drops, the other can often fill the gap. And our county still relies on our 800 MHz land mobile radio system for mission-critical voice, because that remains the backbone of reliable communication in difficult terrain.

We're encouraged by the fact that all the major providers – AT&T through FirstNet, Verizon, and T-Mobile – are moving toward satellite-based solutions. Right now, it's text messaging over satellite, but soon we'll see full voice and data capabilities. Technologies like Starlink are already showing us what's possible. In the near future, a deputy in a canyon in San Bernardino County or a sheriff in rural Idaho should be able to connect directly via satellite when there's no terrestrial coverage at all.

From Congress, what we need is continued support to keep driving this buildout. FirstNet was created for exactly this purpose – to ensure public safety has its own reliable, interoperable broadband system. Reauthorizing FirstNet is critical, not only to guarantee continuity of the program, but to ensure the contractor can continue investing in the infrastructure that will fill coverage gaps in rural counties like mine, and in large, sparsely populated areas like the ones in Idaho you mentioned. Rural America can't be an afterthought in communications. With congressional support, we can make sure these next-generation technologies are deployed equitably and with public safety in mind.

- 2. Do you face any obstacles putting your deployable equipment on federal land? This could include lack of cleared areas and trails that make it more of a challenge to locate towers and generating stations or laying fiber.**

San Bernardino County is over 80 percent federally managed land – forests, BLM lands, and military reservations. These are often the exact areas where we need coverage the most, whether it's a wildfire, a lost hiker, or a flood response. But today, we face significant obstacles in getting deployable equipment or permanent towers on federal property. The challenges aren't technical – they're bureaucratic. Federal agencies like the Forest Service or BLM often already have towers or repeaters but accessing them or co-locating our equipment can take months or years of

paperwork. Meanwhile, our deputies and their rangers may be standing shoulder to shoulder in the field without the ability to talk to one another on a common system.

A clear example in my area of responsibility in San Bernardino County would be P Mountain, or Black Peak, east of Parker, Arizona, where multiple agencies already operate communications infrastructure. San Bernardino County is trying to install upgraded communications buildings and towers there to improve interoperability for deputies, firefighters, and road crews along the Colorado River. This site is critical for mutual aid with La Paz County, fire agencies, and our Colorado River and Needles stations.

The problem is that while the Bureau of Indian Affairs owns the site, the land falls within the Colorado River Indian Tribe reservation. BIA and BLM have required us to secure tribal approval, but discussions with the involved agencies and tribal governments can sometimes come to a stall over priorities. This situation could result in critical upgrades for the region being delayed – even though this is exactly the type of project that could improve public safety communications in rural communities and our tribal communities.

In my opinion, Congress should allow local jurisdictions to have more of a say in how public safety communications infrastructure is developed and shared. Local sheriffs, fire departments, and emergency managers often have more updated and more robust systems than our federal partners, and we are ready to share those capabilities. Sometimes the federal government is simply too large and too slow to manage these needs effectively, and lives are on the line when we wait.

A common-sense congressional fix would be to require agencies to prioritize interoperability and to streamline co-location of infrastructure on federal lands. Local jurisdictions should be empowered to lead, because at the end of the day, we're the ones answering the 911 calls. Federal policy should make it easier – not harder – for us to put the right equipment in place to keep people safe.

Dr. Brian Fontes  
Former Chief Executive Officer  
National Emergency Number Association  
Responses to Questions for the Record  
Public Safety Communications in the United States

**The Honorable Russ Fulcher**

1. Do you face any reception or data send/receive interruptions or delays due to the inability of wireless and broadband providers from deploying equipment on federal lands that may be adjacent to state, local, or private lands in more rural areas?

**ANSWER:**

Within 9-1-1, interruptions of service are not atypical. It is the magnitude of the interruptions or service outages by carriers and broadband providers that matter. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has rules in place with outages that need to be reported to the agency. This requirement is based on the number of wireless customer and length of time of the outage. Daily, there may be small, short-service disruptions, and there can be many causes of those small disruptions, *e.g.*, weather, electrical connection interruption, and these interruptions can be measured in seconds. Again, longer and more widespread disruptions are reported to the FCC.

Deploying communications equipment on federal land or even adjacent to federal lands has been a debated issue for decades since there are competing interests, those seeking to maintain the natural beauty of an area, and those that place the safety and security of those using federal lands as a reason for siting antennae. Putting that debate aside, what matters is the ability to communicate with 9-1-1 and other public safety services. There are steps that can be taken to improve the likelihood of public safety services and hopefully mitigate service disruptions. These include:

- Investment in redundant communications systems servicing 9-1-1 systems.
- Funding the transition to Next Generation 9-1-1 will enable 9-1-1 centers to move calls and data to other 9-1-1 centers if the initial 9-1-1 center experiences a service disruption.
- The FCC can permit increased communication power limits in rural areas and areas adjacent to federal lands to provide better wireless service geographic coverage.

2. Have you heard of problems due to the inability to locate towers, generating stations, or other equipment that are causing such interruptions or delays?

**ANSWER:**

As long as there has been cellular (now wireless) service there has been opposition to the siting of towers. Tower companies have worked with communities to disguise towers (*e.g.*, trees) and blend towers into existing structures. None the less, the debate associated with tower placement continues. Many towers that provide commercial services also provide co-location ability for public safety radio and fixed wireless services. Thus, both the public and public safety services benefit from the placement of towers and supporting power sources.

For temporary/deployable sites during disaster events, government agencies are generally good partners as they have incentives to restore and maintain service for their own emergency management efforts and their citizens. All major wireless carriers have response teams that can issue deployables upon request. For purposes of deploying permanent sites and backup generators, wireless carriers could speak more directly to their experiences in navigating various zoning and other siting restrictions, but I've heard anecdotes about challenges in this area.

**The Honorable Robert Menendez**

1. In New Jersey, Superstorm Sandy showed us how fragile communications systems can be during disasters. As natural disasters continue to become more frequent and severe, resilient, multi-layered public safety networks are essential for keeping Americans safe. I'd like to explore this issue further.

2. Dr. Fontes, how can Congress best ensure the resiliency of public safety networks? And during emergencies, what role do connected vehicle technologies such as OnStar play in keeping residents safe when traditional systems go down?

**ANSWER:**

Congress can ensure there is funding available to transition from legacy 9-1-1 systems to Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) systems. This funding is essential to provide continuity of 9-1-1 service. If a 9-1-1 center is down, then those who can call 9-1-1 will have those calls routed automatically to another 9-1-1 center that is still fully functioning. This is something that the old, legacy 9-1-1 system cannot do. We have seen the benefit of NG9-1-1 in the hurricane ravaged area of western North Carolina after Hurricane Helene.

We communicate in a data-driven world today, and 9-1-1 is largely still tethered to voice communications and are incapable to utilizing data callers could send with their wireless devices. Especially during emergencies, voice, video and data (comprising information-rich 9-1-1 calls) can provide greater safety, more targeted responses, and crucial information targeted to the caller and location-specific situations, *e.g.*, road and bridge washouts, destroyed buildings and infrastructure. Simply put, we need to ensure the next generation of 9-1-1 is funded and upgraded to 21<sup>st</sup> century technology – capable of communicating in a voice and data driven world.

Public safety users, such as emergency responders, not only rely on their own stand-alone radio systems in some areas, but also rely heavily on commercial wireless networks, such as Verizon Frontline, AT&T FirstNet, and T-Mobile's T-Priority. Policies that promote resiliency of commercial networks, for example through tower siting policies that allow the use of backup power, overlapping site coverage, and reliable fiber backhaul, will inevitably redound to the benefit of public safety.

Regarding connected vehicle technologies, many of these technologies, such as OnStar, provide connectivity using regular cellular networks. This means that, if wireless networks are down, connected vehicle technology also would not be available. Connected cars are likely to have a Global Positioning System (GPS) connection, which provides the location of the automobile, but transmission of the vehicle location to the 9-1-1 center would also require the availability of wireless networks. Advanced Automatic Collision Notification (AACN) is a connected vehicle technology that can provide GPS location and hundreds of other data points – such as number of

passengers, airbag deployment, crash severity indicators, presence of fire, impact details, seatbelt status and the number of occupants using seat sensors, vehicle type, post-crash conditions, e.g. roll-over, multiple impacts and vehicle data regarding fuel type (gas vs. electric). This information allows field responders to know the situation before arriving on the scene and prepare the appropriate response. Importantly, this connectivity and information may provide faster dispatch and more appropriate response. Again, such services are dependent on wireless connectivity.

Until now, post-collision data applications have been delivered to 9-1-1 centers “over the top,” meaning outside the normal 9-1-1 call flow and workflow. Soon, with the advent of NG9-1-1, this AACN data can be delivered to 9-1-1 centers natively in the 9-1-1 environment and through the 9-1-1 workflow. This means that 9-1-1 telecommunicators will not be required to interact with a separate application to use AACN data. NENA and APCO have jointly developed standards for the delivery of AACN, and NHTSA is actively engaging with both automotive manufacturers and the 9-1-1 community to improve AACN to 9-1-1. Earlier this year, Toyota announced a partnership with Intrado (the largest U.S. provider of 9-1-1 technology) to bring AACN directly to 9-1-1 centers over NG9-1-1 infrastructure.