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ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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MEMORANDUM

To: Members, Energy and Commerce Committee
From: Majority Staff
Re: Communications and Technology Subcommittee Hearing

I. INTRODUCTION

On Tuesday, September 9, 2025, at 10:15 a.m. (ET), the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology will hold a hearing in 2123 Rayburn House Office Building entitled, "Public Safety Communications in the United States." The following witnesses are expected to testify:

II. WITNESSES

- Mr. Steve Newton, Emergency Management Director, Chatham County Emergency Management
- Sheriff Shannon Dicus, San Bernadino County
- Dr. Brian Fontes, Former Chief Executive Officer, National Emergency Number Association
- Mr. Randall C. Wright, Executive Director, WUFT/WRUF, Florida Public Radio Emergency Network, and Project Beacon

III. BACKGROUND

The first 911 call was placed in February 1968, in Haleyville, Alabama, transforming public safety communications forever.[1] The benefits of the three-digit number were quickly recognized, and adoption was encouraged throughout the United States. By the end of the 20th century Congress made 911 the official universal emergency number and nearly 93 percent of the United States had access to it.[2]

[1] NATIONAL EMERGENCY NUMBER ASSOCIATION, *9-1-1 Origin & History*, www.nena.org/page/911overviewfacts (last accessed Jun. 11, 2025).
[2] 47 U.S. Code § 251(e)(3).

Since then, significant advancements in communications networks and technology have allowed upgrades to the 911 system. Enhanced 911 (E911) services permitted location data to be transmitted with calls to 911, starting with landlines and eventually transitioning to wireless calls.[3] The rise of the internet gave way to Internet Protocol (IP) based 911 services and the development of Next Generation 911 (NG911) technology, which will give first responders better tools to more effectively do their jobs once it is fully deployed.

In 2012, the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) was established and charged with deploying the first communications network dedicated to public safety officials, which is currently being built by AT&T.[4] Other providers, primarily Verizon and T-Mobile, also offer services on their networks for first responders.[5] All providers of emergency communications networks are utilizing cutting edge mobile communications nodes to provide mission-critical communications for first responders in times of emergencies.[6] These deployable assets have a wide range of applicable uses. They can provide communications in remote areas out of reach of traditional communications services,[7] restore temporary service after devastating natural disasters,[8] and increase service capacity during large scale events.[9]

IV. SELECTED ISSUES

A. First Responder Network Authority

In 2002, Congress established the *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (9/11 Commission) to evaluate the circumstances surrounding the terrorist attacks in New York City, New York, on September 11, 2001, and provide recommendations to guard against future attacks.[10] The report found that on September 11, firefighters, police, and other first responders suffered severe communications failures that undermined their ability to coordinate and respond to the attacks. The Commission recommended increased coordination

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[3] FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION, *911 and E911 Services*, www.fcc.gov/general/9-1-1-and-e9-1-1-services (last accessed Jun. 11, 2025).
[4] Jill C. Gallagher, *The First Responder Network (FirstNet) and Next-Generation Communications for Public Safety: Issues for Congress*, CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE (Apr. 27, 2018), www.congress.gov/crs-product/R45179.
[5] Monica Alleven, *T-Mobile, Verizon duke it out for 5G public safety slices*, FIERCE NETWORK (Apr. 30, 2025), www fierce-network.com/wireless/t-mobile-verizon-duke-it-out-5g-public-safety-slices.
[6] Martha DeGrasse, *Public safety gets a boost from Verizon's network upgrades, free devices*, FIERCE NETWORK (Jun. 23, 2025), www.fierce-network.com/broadband/public-safety-gets-boost-verizons-network-upgrades-free-devices; FIRST RESPONDER NETWORK AUTHORITY, *FirstNet deployables provide on-demand coverage for public safety* (Mar. 9, 2025), firstnet.gov/newsroom/blog/firstnet-deployables-provide-demand-coverage-public-safety.
[7] Tracey Murdock, *FirstNet supports disaster response in rural Montana*, FIRSTNET AUTHORITY (Sep. 4, 2024), firstnet.gov/newsroom/blog/firstnet-supports-disaster-response-rural-montana.
[8] Monica Alleven, *Verizon's THOR tackles areas hardest hit by Hurricane Ian*, FIERCE NETWORK (Oct. 5, 2022), www fierce-network.com/tech/verizons-thor-tackles-areas-hardest-hit-hurricane-ian.
[9] Scott Agnew, *Inauguration Day: FirstNet Reliably Connects First Responders at U.S. Capitol*, FIRSTNET, AT&T (Jan. 17, 2025), www.attconnects.com/inauguration-day-firstnet-reliably-connects-first-responders-at-u-s-capitol/.
[10] Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003, P.L. 107-306, tit. VI.

among public safety communications and that Congress dedicate additional radio spectrum for public safety purposes.[11]

FirstNet was created in 2012 as an independent authority within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).[12] FirstNet was charged with developing a dedicated, reliable, secure, and interoperable nationwide public safety broadband network (NPSBN) to support the communications needs of first responders and other public safety officials.[13] In March 2017, FirstNet awarded AT&T a 25-year, $6.5 billion contract and 20 megahertz (20 MHz) of spectrum to build, operate, and maintain the nationwide network for public safety.[14] AT&T has to meet buildout obligations as part of the contract, and shortly after being awarded the contract, AT&T offered priority and preemption service on its network nationwide for public safety users.[15] FirstNet's authority expires on February 22, 2027.

The Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General (OIG) has issued several reports regarding FirstNet's oversight efforts over the deployment of the nationwide public safety broadband network and its operational responses.[16] Recent network outages have also negatively affected subscribers nationwide and hindered the ability of individuals to contact 911 services as well as use the NPSBN itself.[17] While these reports are concerning, they provide a unique opportunity for corrective actions to ensure that the needs of first responders are being met.[18]

In addition to FirstNet, other communications providers are offering similar services on their networks for public safety communications. Verizon's formal public safety offering, Frontline, provides a slice of their network for dedicated use by first responders and is currently utilized by more than 40,000 public safety agencies nationwide.[19] T-Mobile has recently begun

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[11] THE 9/11 COMMISSION, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (Jul. 22, 2004), 9-11commission.gov/report/.
[12] Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012, P.L. 112-96, § 6204.
[13] Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012, P.L. 112-96, § 6206.
[14] Jill C. Gallagher, *The First Responder Network (FirstNet) and Next-Generation Communications for Public Safety: Issues for Congress*, CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE (Apr. 27, 2018), www.congress.gov/crs-product/R45179.
[15] *Id.*
[16] DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, *FirstNet Authority's Lack of Contract Oversight for Device Connection Targets Puts the NPSBN at Risk of Impacting First Responders' Use of the Network*, OIG-24-027-A (Jun. 12, 2024); *FirstNet Authority Failed to Provide Adequate Contract Oversight for Its Initial Two Reinvestment Task Orders*, OIG-23-012-A (Mar. 1, 2023); and *FirstNet Authority's Lack of NPSBN Contract Oversight for Coverage Puts at Risk First Responders' Ability to Serve the Public Effectively*, OIG-24-026-A (Jun. 5, 2024).
[17] Jill C. Gallagher; Colby Leigh Pechtol, *AT&T Network Outage: Impact on Public Safety Services*, CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE (Mar. 13, 2024), www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF12613.
[18] DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL, *Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network Was Not Always Available to First Responders During the Catastrophic 2023 Maui Wildfires*, OIG-25-004-A (Dec. 5, 2024).
[19] Press Release, VERIZON, *Verizon Frontline Network Slice launches coast-to-coast* (Apr. 24, 2025), www.verizon.com/about/news/verizon-frontline-network-slice-launches.

offering public safety communications services with a dedicated network slice for first responders based on their 5G standalone core network.[20]

B. Next Generation 911

A Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) is a center established to send and receive 911 calls.[21] Due to advancements and innovation in public safety technology, PSAPs across the country are transitioning from traditional analog emergency communications systems to more advanced Next Generation 911 technology.[22] These new systems use internet protocol (IP) based technology which allows for more advanced features and capabilities including the ability to process additional types of data such as text messages, images, and video, in addition to standard voice calls. PSAPs with advanced capabilities will be able to integrate sophisticated technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI). PSAPs can integrate AI into their call receiving operations to sort and manage non-emergency calls, which helps human public safety call takers prioritize the most important calls during times of high call volume.[23] As large language models progress, they can be utilized for real-time translation between different languages, further assisting both call takers and first responders in the field.[24]

A major component of NG911 equipped facilities is the ability to interconnect to other call centers. Interconnection can allow calls to be seamlessly transferred between PSAPs, increasing redundancies and ensuring that 911 calls can still be answered in the event of an outage or natural disaster.[25] However, as more PSAPs across the country transition to NG911 services and IP-based systems, there is an increased risk that they become targets for cyberattacks, so appropriate cybersecurity measures should accompany upgrades.[26]

A 2018 report completed by NTIA and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimated that full deployment of NG911 would cost between $9.5 and $12.7 billion.[27]

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[20] Press Release, T-MOBILE, *T-Mobile Introduces 'T-Priority' Featuring the World's First Network Slice for First Responders* (Sep. 18, 2024), www.t-mobile.com/news/business/t-priority-network-slice-for-first-responders.
[21] Jill C. Gallagher, *Next Generation 911 Technologies: Select Issues for Congress*, CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE (Jul. 9, 2018), www.congress.gov/crs-product/R45253.
[22] *Id.*
[23] James Careless, *Filling the PSAP Gap with AI-Enabled ViizViital,* ALL THINGS FIRSTNET (Apr. 9, 2025), allthingsfirstnet.com/filling-the-psap-gap-with-ai-enabled-viizviital/.
[24] James Careless, *FirstNet Webinar Spotlights the Power of AI for Helping Public Safety,* ALL THINGS FIRSTNET (Mar. 13, 2025), allthingsfirstnet.com/firstnet-webinar-spotlights-the-power-of-ai-for-helping-public-safety/.
[25] Jill C. Gallagher, *Next Generation 911 Technologies: Select Issues for Congress*, CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE (Jul. 9, 2018), www.congress.gov/crs-product/R45253.
[26] *Id.*; CYBERSECURITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY AGENCY, *Emergency Service Sector Landscape* (Nov. 2023), www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-01/ess-landscape_112023_508.pdf.
[27] NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION, NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION, *Next Generation 911 Cost Estimate, A Report to Congress* (Oct. 2018), www.911.gov/assets/Next_Generation_911_Cost_Estimate_Report_to_Congress_2018-1638220685.pdf.

C. Other Issues

In 2002, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) allocated 50 MHz of spectrum in the 4.9 GHz band for fixed and mobile public safety services to be used by state and local entities.[28] Historically, the 4.9 GHz band faced drastic underutilization and lack of coordination, with only 3,174 out of 90,000 eligible licenses in use.[29] In October 2024, in an effort to encourage utilization, coordination, and investment within the 4.9 GHz band, the FCC adopted new rules for the band. The rules outlined the role of a Band Manager to coordinate public safety operations in the band and to enter a spectrum sharing agreement with FirstNet to use.[30]

Additionally, the Integrated Public Alert & Warning System (IPAWS) is the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) national system for local alerting that provides authenticated emergency and life-saving information to the public through radio and television via the Emergency Alert System (EAS), to mobile phones using Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEAs), and on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Weather Radio.[31]

The EAS is a national public warning system commonly used by state and local authorities to deliver important emergency information, such as weather and AMBER alerts, to affected communities over television and radio.[32] This system's principal purpose is also to provide the President of the United States with the capability to address the American people within 10 minutes during a national emergency.[33] Broadcast, cable, and satellite operators are the stewards of this public service in close partnership with state, local, tribal, and territorial authorities.[34] FEMA, in partnership with the FCC and NOAA, is responsible for implementing, maintaining, and operating the EAS at the federal level. Most EAS alerts originate from the National Weather Service in response to severe weather events, but an increasing number of state, local, territorial, and tribal authorities also send alerts. In addition, the NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards network, the only federally sponsored radio transmission of warning information to the public, is part of the EAS.[35]

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[28] 47 C.F.R § 2.103(b).
[29] Jill C. Gallagher, *4.9 GHz Public Safety Band: Competing Views on Use*, CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE (Mar. 31, 2025), www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF12766.
[30] *Id.*
[31] FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, *Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS), Process Map Playbook, Version 2.0* (Feb. 2023), www fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_ipaws-process-playbook-version-2.pdf.
[32] FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION, *The Emergency Alert System (EAS)* (last accessed Jul. 7, 2025), www fcc.gov/emergency-alert-system.
[33] FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, *Emergency Alert System* (last accessed Jul. 7, 2025), www fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system/public/emergency-alert-system.
[34] *Id.*
[35] *Id.*

WEAs are short emergency messages from authorized federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial public alerting authorities that can be broadcast from cell towers to any WEA-enabled mobile device in a locally targeted area. Wireless providers primarily use cellular broadcast technology for WEA message delivery. WEAs can be sent to mobile devices when someone may be in harm's way, without the need to download an app or subscribe to a service. WEAs are short messages that warn the public of an impending natural or human-made disaster.[36]

V. KEY QUESTIONS

- Do first responders have the communications tools necessary to do their jobs effectively?
- Are the communications networks that first responders use secure?
- What does the future of public safety communications look like?

VI. STAFF CONTACTS

If you have any questions regarding this hearing, please contact Kate Harper or Dylan Rogers of the Committee Staff at (202) 225-3641.

[36] FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY, *Wireless Emergency Alerts* (last accessed Jul. 7, 2025), www fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/integrated-public-alert-warning-system/public/wireless-emergency-alerts.