



COMMITTEE ON
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DEMOCRATS
RANKING MEMBER FRANK PALLONE, JR.

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Pallone Opening Remarks at FirstNet Hearing

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Communications and Technology hearing titled, “Oversight of FirstNet: State Perspectives:”*

Thank you for holding this hearing on states perspectives on FirstNet. New Jersey was one of the first states to opt-in, which makes sense given JerseyNet’s success as a proof of concept for FirstNet as a whole.

FirstNet implementation is essential for creating a state-of-the art, nationwide public safety network. This is critical during emergencies. This week marks five years since Superstorm Sandy swept through my district. The lessons of that storm are as applicable today as they were then. And five years later, I can say there are three things we need to focus on to make sure we are better prepared for the next major storm.

First, we need to keep our networks online during these emergencies. That’s why I drafted the SANDy Act to give our network operators the resources they need to repair our networks during disasters. And that’s also why I worked with the wireless industry to create the Wireless Network Resiliency Cooperative Framework to ensure people can call for help during an emergency even if their network goes down.

Second, we need to upgrade our 9-1-1 networks to be more secure and resilient and to handle the information required of a 21st century network. Among other things, that means ensuring that 9-1-1 knows your location when you place a call.

And third, we need to get FirstNet operational as quickly as possible to give our first responders the tools they need to better protect us and coordinate emergency responses.

Getting these three things right is critical now more than ever as it seems every day we’re hearing about another natural disaster in the news. Just this past weekend, Tropical Storm Phillippe hit the Northeast. This comes on the heels of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, and the devastating wildfires out west.

With each of these disasters, we've relied on first responders to protect us. But we all know that job isn't an easy one, particularly in major catastrophes when fire, police, and EMS officials must be brought in from neighboring states. In those trying times, the ability to coordinate rescue and recovery efforts can mean the difference between life and death for those stranded in harm's way.

For that reason, we charged FirstNet with building a nationwide, interoperable, public safety network for the 21st century. First responders need this network, and they needed it yesterday. That's why it's critical that Congress exercise its oversight and ensure the network is tough and that we aren't taking any unnecessary risks.

We owe it to our constituents to make sure FirstNet's network is public safety grade and is deployed as quickly as possible. And while I am concerned that we do not all share that goal, I'm hopeful that today's oversight hearing will demonstrate the real need for getting full deployment completed soon.

I thank our witnesses for testifying today, and I yield back.

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