

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

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

February 4, 2026

Thank you, Chairman Hudson.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you, and I yield back.