

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Many of America’s emergency communications centers rely on outdated infrastructure and technologies from half a century ago.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.

Next Generation 9-1-1 is a critical public safety initiative that would 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 life-saving information before they arrive at the scene. These funds would save lives, but Republicans walked away from the agreement to invest in this program with their Big Ugly Bill. This 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 (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.