

**Committee on Energy and Commerce**  
**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery**  
**of**  
**Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.**

***Markup of 1 Bill, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology***

**February 10, 2026**

I am pleased the Subcommittee is holding this markup of six bills to improve our nation's public safety communications capabilities.

Today, the Subcommittee is considering bipartisan legislation introduced by Representatives McClellan and Dunn to reauthorize the First Responder Network Authority. We must reauthorize this Authority to ensure we are providing first responders with reliable, interoperable communications during emergencies when it matters most. It is critical that we resolve the looming sunset of FirstNet and I commit to doing all I can to support that effort.

At the Subcommittee hearing last week on this legislation, witnesses stressed how the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network is an essential component of our emergency communications infrastructure. It provides an invaluable service keeping first responders connected not just when crises occur but also supports increased connectivity during major events like the Super Bowl this past Sunday in San Francisco, or the World Cup Finals at the Meadowlands in New Jersey later this year.

Much of FirstNet's popularity with public safety users is the fact that the network has been deployed with direct input from public safety leaders who serve on the FirstNet Board. Since the early days of planning and standing up the network, to expanding coverage and upgrading services more recently, the FirstNet Board has ensured public safety has multiple seats at the table and a central role in the Authority's activities.

It is critically important that we ensure the voices of public safety leaders remain at the table. That's why I am pleased the legislation before us today actually improves public safety representation on the Board by raising the number of Board seats reserved for public safety representatives from three to five. The bill also makes a technical correction to fix the stacking of Board terms so that only a portion of seats become vacant at one time. This should address the issue of brain drain from the Board while alleviating the burden of re-filling many vacancies at one time.

It is also clear, however, that the original classification in law of the First Responder Network Authority as both an independent authority and an authority under the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has been a source of unnecessary confusion over the years. This unique situation has created structural problems with the FirstNet Authority that have, at times, opened the door to poor decision making and waste without any consequence for those responsible.

The Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General has identified a handful of troubling circumstances and actions that make clear there is not enough oversight of the Executive Director position under the current structure, which prevents accountability when it is called for.

The legislation proposes to eliminate the ambiguity in current law by bringing the FirstNet Authority more formally under the purview of NTIA with the full intention of preserving the autonomy of FirstNet Authority leadership and employees over day-to-day operations, emergency response, strategic planning, and other activities they currently carry out. I appreciated feedback from witnesses and public safety stakeholders who have recommended that the Committee more explicitly contemplate the division of roles and responsibilities in the legislation. Those kinds of recommendations and others are highly useful as we move ahead with this process.

I look forward to continuing to work with Chairs Guthrie and Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, and Representatives McClellan and Dunn to continue to strengthen the bill in order to build broad support in advance of a full Committee markup. I am confident that with continued bipartisan cooperation and good-faith participation by Members and stakeholders alike, we will reauthorize FirstNet and guarantee first responders do not lose access to this critical service.

Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.