

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

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

February 4, 2026

The Subcommittee has worked hard in recent months to advance bipartisan efforts to improve public safety communications. And I am glad to see that work continuing today as we discuss legislation to reauthorize the First Responder Network Authority.

Since its creation following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, FirstNet has delivered unprecedented connectivity to law enforcement, fire services, emergency medical services, and many other public safety personnel who serve our communities every day.

Prior to those attacks, the market for priority and preemptive services for first responders did not really exist. The Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS) has been around for some time and, more recently, the nationwide Wireless Priority Service (WPS). Yet nothing comes close to the mobile capabilities and exclusivity that are available to first responders today and offered by three different nationwide providers who compete fiercely for public safety’s business. Some of my colleagues might not want to believe it, but government intervention and investment by Congress in 2012 actually opened the door to more competition while raising the bar for public safety communications services.

As we look to reauthorize First Responder Network Authority, it’s important that we recognize that many of the conditions that existed when it was created in 2012 have changed significantly in 14 years. We also have the benefit of examination and analysis from the Commerce Department’s Office of Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office. They have both identified issues that have led FirstNet to fall short of its mission at times to serve first responders. Some of those problems are structural while others have been addressed on an ongoing basis by the FirstNet Authority as they’ve arisen. In any case, the text in the discussion draft before us today represents a good faith effort to address concerns that have been raised with the Committee over the years.

It is also clear that the FirstNet service remains overwhelmingly popular with the vast majority of public safety organizations. Ultimately, the user experience and functionality from the perspective of first responders and public safety subscribers is the most important metric for us to consider. I am committed to ensuring that we do no harm to the service in the course of this effort.

I am aware of the passion and interest this issue has across a broad range of stakeholders. I have appreciated hearing the perspectives of our friends in public safety, representatives of federal, state, and local governments, and wireless industry stakeholders who offer these services. I look forward to continuing those conversations this year as we work through the

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regular order process to achieve consensus that can pass both the House and Senate and be signed into law by the year's end.

So, let me thank Representatives McClellan and Dunn for their leadership in this effort that is absolutely critical to keeping first responders connected when it matters most.

I want to yield the remainder of my time to Representative McClellan.