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3 February 2026

The Honorable S. Brett Guthrie
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Frank J. Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Guthrie and Representative Pallone,

I am writing on behalf of the members of the Fraternal Order of Police to advise you of our strong support for the swift reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) in a way that upholds and bolsters its focus on public safety priorities. Our members, who serve on the front lines in communities throughout the nation, depend on FirstNet's reliable framework to perform their duties safely and effectively.

The foundation of FirstNet's success lies in its alignment with the practical demands of everyday public safety operations. This approach has positioned it as a benchmark for effective collaborations between government and private sectors. The FOP firmly backs the extension of FirstNet and initiatives to increase authentic representation from public safety leaders on its Board, with an emphasis on grassroots and local perspectives.

Created in 2012 within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), FirstNet has transformed emergency communications across the country. Following a competitive selection, AT&T emerged as the primary provider and secured a 25-year agreement in 2017. The network guarantees preferential treatment and override capabilities in crises, facilitating smooth collaboration among responders to safeguard lives and assets. With the February 2027 expiration quickly approaching, we commend the ongoing efforts to maintain this essential system for homeland security, crisis management, and routine public safety services.

FirstNet marks a significant leap forward in response capabilities, addressing the shortcomings revealed during the September 11, 2001, attacks. In partnership with AT&T, FirstNet now provides a specialized nationwide platform utilized by over 30,000 public safety groups and handling nearly eight million connections. Its reliability has been proven time and again in catastrophes, high-stakes events, and security operations. For instance, the December 2024 House Task Force analysis of the Butler, Pennsylvania, event emphasized that officers using FirstNet experienced no major disruptions in service, ensuring continuous high-priority links for numerous responders amid the turmoil. The Task Force's report noted that during the incident "law enforcement personnel with FirstNet cellular service did not have notable interference with their connectivity."

Ongoing legislative scrutiny has spotlighted FirstNet's accomplishments alongside areas ripe for enhancement. The 28 January 2026 Senate Subcommittee hearing on Telecommunications and Media, entitled "Frontline Connectivity: Assessing FirstNet's Impact on Public Safety," underscored its

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benefits while identifying paths for further development. Meanwhile, the House Committee's upcoming hearing, entitled "Assessing FirstNet: Effectiveness, Oversight, and Renewal," will have the opportunity to consider draft legislation, the "First Responder Network Authority Renewal Act" which will be introduced by Representatives Neal P. Dunn (R-FL) and Jennifer L. McClellan (D-VA).

The FOP acknowledges Congress's role in evaluating FirstNet's operations and identifying where improvements are needed. We will continue to share insights from law enforcement officers—whose lives depend on these critical communications systems—as deliberations proceed. We are, however, concerned that some provisions of the proposed bill might inadvertently weaken the key elements driving FirstNet's success. Certain clauses could impose redundant governmental oversight, heighten procedural burdens, and escalate expenses without tangible advantages for public safety. Overall, these alterations could blur FirstNet's primary objectives and introduce uncertainties that jeopardize emergency operations, community protection, and public safety.

The FOP supports robust accountability and transparency. Yet, elements of the draft could foster unnecessary administrative hurdles that slow down FirstNet's functionality. Its development and triumphs stem from direct responsiveness to users at the State and local levels.

FirstNet already faces rigorous scrutiny through yearly disclosures, evaluations, audits, and assessments by its Board, the Commerce Department's Inspector General, the GAO, Congress, NTIA, and the FCC. Introducing other redundancies would shift focus from technological advancements and upgrades to mere regulatory adherence, yielding no direct gains for public or officer safety.

Moreover, FirstNet operates in a vibrant market where rivals like Verizon Frontline and T-Mobile's priority services cater to many agencies. During last week's Senate hearing, Verizon's Cory Davis noted serving over 45,000 entities, including a dominant 61% in New Mexico. This rivalry highlights the need to keep FirstNet agile and dedicated.

Other provisions in the draft bill seem to broaden compatibility rules in manners that might compromise specialized systems and reduce priority for responders in critical moments. These issues recall the coordination gaps noted by the 9/11 Commission, which FirstNet was built to fix. Past Board Chairs have cautioned that integrating FirstNet into larger bureaucratic structures could revive old weaknesses, marginalize frontline input, and delay vital choices. Maintaining its standalone setup, with precise management tweaks, ensures it stays adaptable and attuned to safety needs.

Other provisions in the draft bill appear to expand interoperability mandates in ways that could erode dedicated infrastructure and dilute priority access for first responders during emergencies. This could impair Band 14's vital override functions, muddle leadership, and obscure responsibility lines. As Sheriff Michael Adkinson, Jr., Acting Chair of the FirstNet Authority (FNA) board, testified at the last week's Senate hearing, appropriate oversight is welcomed, but he cautioned against creating a diffusion of responsibility – what he described as a "tyranny of the commons...when it becomes everybody's responsibility it becomes no one's responsibility," which could weaken accountability and increase incentives to finger-point if failures occur.

As the committee begins consideration of this draft legislation, the FOP advises against unnecessary, overly prescriptive, or duplicative requirements that could hinder FirstNet's operational effectiveness. Proposals diverting investments from core improvements would erode the cost-effectiveness that has enabled taxpayer-free delivery of immense value to public safety.

We encourage the Committees to consider a clean reauthorization that eliminates the expiration clause and confines adjustments to those proven to fortify FirstNet's safety-oriented purpose. Thank you for your guidance and dedication to those who protect our nation. The FOP stands ready to further engage with the committee.

On behalf of the more than 382,000 members of the Fraternal Order of Police, I thank you all for taking into consideration our views on this matter. If I can provide any additional information about this bill, please do not hesitate to contact me or Executive Director Jim Pasco in our Washington, D.C. office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick Yoes", with a large, stylized initial "P" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Patrick Yoes
National President

cc: Scott Hildebrand, President, Kentucky State Lodge
Shawn Helbig, National Trustee, Kentucky State Lodge
Bob Fox, President, New Jersey State Lodge
Kevin Vernon, National Trustee, New Jersey State Lodge