Public Safety Broadband Technology Association

Public Safety Spectrum Alliance

Why the FirstNet Authority Should Be Reauthorized

The FNA kept its promise to public safety. Now it's time to reauthorize the Authority.

WHO:

The First Responder Network Authority—better known as the FirstNet Authority (FNA)—is an independent agency within the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).

The FNA oversees the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN), commonly known as FirstNet, the country's only dedicated public safety broadband network for public safety and first responders. Established in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, the FNA is responsible for the buildout, deployment and oversight of the operation of FirstNet to ensure contractual compliance by its vendor partner.

> *"You have to rely on FirstNet to communicate and make sure you do not lose that communication, because that is their lifeline and your means of preventing something else tragic from happening."*
>
> – Ian Parkinson, Sheriff, San Luis Obispo County, California

WHAT:

For many years, public safety had been calling for a single technology solution that would be fully interoperable across the country. In 2012, in a bipartisan effort, Congress passed legislation establishing this single nationwide network and allocating $7 billion and 20 megahertz of broadband spectrum to build and operate the network through 2027. The FNA is funded through fees paid to lease the broadband spectrum.

Through a groundbreaking and rigorous competitive procurement process, the Authority secured a major wireless carrier—AT&T—to build out the network. (The RFP process included an explicit invitation to each wireless carrier to bid on the contract; only AT&T did so.) The FirstNet Authority-AT&T collaboration is one of the largest and most successful public-private partnerships ever—a role model of what's possible when government and the private sector work well together.

> *"FirstNet is the first time we've ever been connected in the vehicle itself. I tell friends and family that they may not know it, but they're safer. Officers are safer."*
>
> – Tawny Zimiga, IT Director, Department of Public Safety, Oglala Sioux Tribe, South Dakota

Highlights of the Authority's accomplishments include:

- Creation of the single largest interoperable digital platform since the Internet, delivered on time and on budget by the FNA with AT&T. FirstNet continues to adhere to its foundational requirements: creating and operating a single, self-sustaining technology that's interoperable nationwide and available only to public safety.
- More than 7 million connections have been established across 30,000+ public safety agencies, as of March 2025. FirstNet provides first responders priority and preemption across more than 2.99 million square miles of coverage (250,000 more than commercial networks).
- A robust FirstNet ecosystem of hundreds of apps, devices and vendor solutions, independently vetted and verified for reliability and interoperability.

> *"Without FirstNet, our incident commanders would not have been able to communicate vital information on the scene."*
>
> – Gert Zoutendijk, Oregon State Fire Marshal, speaking about the Lees Fall Fire in August 2024

WHEN:

By February 2027, the Authority must be reauthorized by Congress to complete its contract and continue to support and advance this unique and critical network. There is some urgency to proceed with reauthorization. As a February 2022 U.S. Government Accountability Office report stated, "without legislative action, the public-safety network will be at risk and first responders could lose service. Congress should consider reauthorizing FirstNet before the 2027 end date to ensure network continuity."

"FirstNet provided us with that reliability, the robustness…so that we could do a lot more than just make telephone calls. We have capabilities with the internet, with mapping, and we're able to upload searches we've done and a lot of our operational stuff. The fact that FirstNet could do this was instrumental to our success."

– Don Lombardi, Fire Chief, West Metro Fire Rescue, Lakewood, Colorado, a sponsoring agency chief for a FEMA Urban Search and Rescue team during Hurricane Helene

"Really the only thing I knew about communications were, give me a radio and let it work. But FirstNet walked me through the process of creating the technology of making things work with broadband. I was very fortunate everything aligned for us… The interoperability and the redundancy were all in place to allow us to put together a pretty good model that I think will be here for years to come."

–Joe Duvall, Police Chief, Dallas Police Department

WHY:

- The FirstNet Authority kept its promise to the federal government and to public safety. This first-of-its-kind network was created on schedule and on budget. The FNA has never sought additional funds from Congress to complete or continue its work.
- A single nationwide network is what emergency responders demanded and what they require in an increasingly complex, technology-driven world.
- More than 30,000 agencies across the country now depend on FirstNet to provide reliable, priority connections during and after natural and man-made disasters, at large events and across frontier, rural, remote and Tribal areas, as well as in dense urban centers.
- There's no federal appropriation for FirstNet, which is funded through lease fees paid by AT&T. So eliminating the Authority will not save money for the federal government.
- Oversight is necessary to ensure the network never weakens or reneges on its most critical and fundamental commitment: supporting public safety.

To learn more about what FirstNet has accomplished and why reauthorization of the nation's only dedicated public safety broadband network is imperative, scan the QR code below.

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