



**Congressional  
Research Service**

Informing the legislative debate since 1914

---

# First Responder Network (FirstNet) Authority: Reauthorization and Selected Issues

April 29, 2026

**Congressional Research Service**

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R48923



## First Responder Network (FirstNet) Authority: Reauthorization and Selected Issues

R48923

April 29, 2026

**Colby Leigh Pechtold**  
Specialist in  
Telecommunications  
Policy

**Amanda H. Peskin**  
Analyst in  
Telecommunications  
Policy

In the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-96)—in response to communications issues experienced during the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and other disasters—Congress created the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority). The FirstNet Authority is an independent authority within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), under the U.S. Department of Commerce. P.L. 112-96 tasked the FirstNet Authority with establishing a nationwide public safety broadband network (FirstNet Network) dedicated to and customized for public safety use. The act provided \$7 billion in electromagnetic spectrum auction proceeds to fund the FirstNet Authority and FirstNet Network; allocated 20 megahertz of spectrum for public safety use; directed the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to grant a renewable 10-year spectrum license to the FirstNet Authority (which was granted in 2012 and renewed in 2023); authorized the FirstNet Authority to enter into a public-private partnership to develop, deploy, and operate the FirstNet Network; and directed that the FirstNet Network be permanently self-sustaining. The statutory authorization of the FirstNet Authority expires in February 2027.

In March 2017, the FirstNet Authority awarded a 25-year contract to AT&T to build and maintain the FirstNet Network. P.L. 112-96 required that states be given the choice to opt in to the FirstNet Network or opt out and build a separate statewide network that would be interoperable with the FirstNet Network. By January 2018, all states, territories, and the District of Columbia had opted in, meaning AT&T would be deploying the FirstNet Network in each jurisdiction. In March 2018, the FirstNet Authority announced that AT&T had begun deploying the FirstNet Network, including the core network and cell sites, in each state. By December 2023, the FirstNet Authority validated that the initial five-year build-out was complete. In February 2024, the FirstNet Authority (with AT&T) announced plans to reinvest up to \$8 billion over the next 10 years to expand and evolve the FirstNet Network. As of October 2025, the FirstNet Authority and AT&T reported that over 30,000 public safety agencies and organizations use the FirstNet Network, including several federal agencies.

In the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress, both the House and Senate have held hearings on FirstNet. The hearings centered on assessing progress of the FirstNet Network and other policy issues, including clarification of the FirstNet Authority's and NTIA's management responsibilities, interoperability with other networks, recent audit findings, and expiration of the authorizing statute.

A key issue for Congress is reauthorization of the FirstNet Authority. Other concerns may include organizational and structural issues within the FirstNet Authority and between the FirstNet Authority and NTIA; oversight of the FirstNet Authority and FirstNet Network; market competition; and interoperability with other networks, including Next Generation 911. Legislation relating to the FirstNet Authority has been introduced in the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress. For example, H.R. 1519 would provide statutory authority for the Office of Public Safety Communications (within NTIA) to support efforts related to public safety communications, including managing and auditing the FirstNet Authority. H.R. 7386 would extend the FirstNet Authority's statutory authorization through 2037 and take measures to increase transparency and accountability.

Options for Congress could include removing or extending the FirstNet Authority's sunset provision, set forth in P.L. 112-96. Removing the sunset provision would authorize the FirstNet Authority to operate permanently and could help to avoid uncertainty around the future of the FirstNet Network and services. On the other hand, retaining the reauthorization provision could allow Congress to periodically assess the progress and performance of the FirstNet Network and address policy issues of interest to Congress. Congress could extend the FirstNet Authority's authorization, for example, to align with the expiration of the current AT&T contract or impose certain conditions—such as changing the FirstNet Authority's organizational structure, requiring interoperability between FirstNet and other networks, or encouraging more carriers within the FirstNet Network. Congress could also opt not to reauthorize the FirstNet Authority, which could raise questions regarding the fate of the spectrum license, management of the FirstNet Network, and oversight of the contract with AT&T.

## Contents

Introduction .....	1
FirstNet: Authority Structure .....	2
FirstNet: Network .....	3
Spectrum License .....	5
Timeline of Implementation Events .....	6
Selected Policy Issues and Options for Congress .....	8
Reauthorization of the FirstNet Authority .....	8
Extending the Reauthorization Date .....	8
Removing the Sunset Date and Permanently Reauthorizing .....	9
Choosing Not to Reauthorize and Allowing to Sunset .....	9
Organizational Structure of FirstNet .....	9
Maintaining Current Structure of FirstNet Within NTIA .....	10
Establishing FirstNet as a Separate Federal Entity .....	12
Moving FirstNet to Another Federal Agency .....	12
Market Competition .....	13
Integration with Next Generation 911 .....	16

## Figures

Figure 1. FirstNet Network .....	3
Figure 2. FirstNet Network Implementation Timeline .....	6

## Contacts

Author Information .....	18
--------------------------	----

## Introduction

Communications are critical during emergency response. In a 1996 report—after a series of large-scale emergency events during which responders experienced communication challenges—a public safety advisory body asserted that the “effectiveness of police officers, fire fighters, emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, and other Public Safety officials is inextricably tied to communications capability” and called for improvements in public safety communications.<sup>1</sup> Five years later, during the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, responders experienced communication challenges, raising congressional attention on public safety communications.<sup>2</sup>

In November 2002, P.L. 107-306 was enacted, which, among other things, created the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (9/11 Commission). The 9/11 Commission was directed to prepare an account of the events leading up to and of that day and provide recommendations to Congress and the President to guard against future attacks. In its July 2004 report, the 9/11 Commission noted that the inability of first responders to communicate impacted the response that day.<sup>3</sup> It stated that “the occurrence of this problem at three very different sites is strong evidence that compatible and adequate communications among public safety organizations at the local, state, and federal levels remains an important problem.”<sup>4</sup>

The 9/11 Commission cited several technical issues for these communications difficulties, such as the inability of some radios to operate in the World Trade Center; radios operating on different frequencies, inhibiting interoperability; and radio frequencies overloaded by the large number of responders trying to communicate with one another.<sup>5</sup> The 9/11 Commission also noted several nontechnical issues that affected response, including command and control challenges (i.e., a lack of coordination among multiple agencies and jurisdictions responding to the situation).<sup>6</sup>

To address these challenges, the 9/11 Commission made several recommendations. For example, one was that all levels of government should adopt the Incident Command System (ICS)—a standardized approach to command, control, and coordination. Other recommendations included increasing allocation of radio spectrum for public safety use to accommodate a large number of users during disasters, fostering interoperability between public safety agencies at all levels of government, and ensuring first responders can communicate during emergencies.<sup>7</sup>

To this end, Congress authorized the creation of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority) under Title VI of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-96). Congress designated 20 megahertz (MHz)<sup>8</sup> of spectrum for public safety broadband use,

---

<sup>1</sup> Public Safety Wireless Committee, *Final Report of the Public Safety Wireless Committee to the Federal Communications Commission and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration*, September 11, 1996, p. 5, [https://www.ntia.gov/files/ntia/publications/pswac\\_al.pdf](https://www.ntia.gov/files/ntia/publications/pswac_al.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Public Safety Wireless Network, *Answering the Call: Communications Lessons Learned from the Pentagon Attack*, January 2002, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/answering-call-communications-lessons-learned-pentagon-attack>.

<sup>3</sup> 9/11 Commission, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, July 22, 2004, p. 299, <https://www.9-11commission.gov/report/911Report.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> 9/11 Commission, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p. 397.

<sup>5</sup> 9/11 Commission, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, pp. 281-285.

<sup>6</sup> 9/11 Commission, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p. 305.

<sup>7</sup> 9/11 Commission, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, p. 397.

<sup>8</sup> In this report, when the word “megahertz” is spelled out, it indicates bandwidth or amount of spectrum. The (continued...)

directed the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to grant a spectrum license to the FirstNet Authority, authorized the FirstNet Authority to enter into a public-private partnership to build a nationwide public safety broadband network (FirstNet Network), and provided \$7 billion in spectrum auction proceeds to fund the FirstNet Authority and the FirstNet Network.<sup>9</sup>

Statutory authorization for the FirstNet Authority expires in February 2027.<sup>10</sup> To inform congressional debate, this report provides background on the FirstNet Authority and the FirstNet Network, a timeline of FirstNet Network implementation events, and selected issues for congressional consideration related to reauthorization of the FirstNet Authority.

## FirstNet: Authority Structure

The structure of the FirstNet Authority includes several components, as directed in P.L. 112-96. The FirstNet Authority is led by a 15-member board composed of 3 permanent members—the Secretary of Homeland Security, the U.S. Attorney General, and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget (or their designees)—and 12 nonpermanent members who are appointed by the Secretary of Commerce for three-year terms.<sup>11</sup> P.L. 112-96 requires that three of the board’s members represent state, local, tribal, and territorial interests; three of its members represent public safety entities; and additional members represent geographical and regional interests and rural and urban interests.<sup>12</sup> The board has established committees to “perform, review, approve, oversee, and recommend actions for a variety of FirstNet activities.”<sup>13</sup>

The FirstNet Authority was created as an independent authority within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), an agency under the U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC). The FirstNet Authority is subject to oversight and audits by DOC’s Office of Inspector General (OIG).<sup>14</sup> Specifically, NTIA’s Office of Public Safety Communications has several responsibilities related to the FirstNet Authority, such as supporting deployment, operation, and maintenance of the FirstNet Network; approving the collection of subscriber fees; and assisting the Secretary of Commerce with the recruiting, vetting, and recommendations of nonpermanent board members.<sup>15</sup> The board collaborates with the FirstNet Authority CEO, who is named by NTIA.<sup>16</sup>

The FirstNet Authority also has a public safety advisory committee (PSAC), which provides guidance, information, and subject matter expertise to help ensure the FirstNet Network meets user needs, requirements, and operational capabilities; conducts meetings on the progress of the

---

abbreviation “MHz” (megahertz) or “GHz” (gigahertz) is used to indicate a specific frequency or range of frequencies in a band. For example, the spectrum band containing frequencies ranging from 3450 to 3550 MHz has a bandwidth of 100 megahertz.

<sup>9</sup> The First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority) oversees the FirstNet Network. See FirstNet Authority, “About Us,” <https://firstnet.gov/about>.

<sup>10</sup> See P.L. 112-96, Title VI, §6206(f).

<sup>11</sup> See P.L. 112-96, Title VI, §6204(b).

<sup>12</sup> See P.L. 112-96, Title VI, §6204(b)(2).

<sup>13</sup> FirstNet Authority, “FirstNet Authority Board Committees,” <https://firstnet.gov/about/board>.

<sup>14</sup> See Department of Commerce, Office of Inspector General, “Reports,” <https://www.oig.doc.gov/reports/?keywords=&bureau=First+Responder+Network+Authority&type=&number=&min=&max=>.

<sup>15</sup> National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), “Public Safety,” <https://www.ntia.gov/programs-and-initiatives/public-safety>.

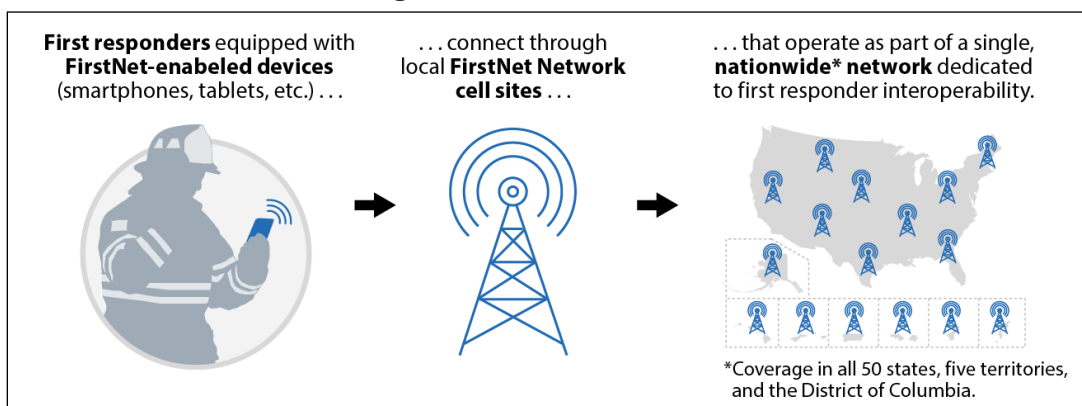
<sup>16</sup> FirstNet Authority, “Mike Cannon Named FirstNet Authority Executive Director and CEO,” May 1, 2025, <https://firstnet.gov/newsroom/press-releases/mike-cannon-named-firstnet-authority-executive-director-and-ceo>. The FirstNet Authority CEO position is not set forth in statute.

FirstNet Network; and advises the FirstNet Authority as it creates documents, plans, or reports relating to the FirstNet Network.<sup>17</sup>

## FirstNet: Network

The FirstNet Network is a public-private partnership with AT&T, which won the 25-year contract to develop, deploy, and operate the nationwide public safety network.<sup>18</sup> The intent of the FirstNet Network is to provide a network that public safety entities at all levels of government can use to enable interoperability among agencies using voice and high-speed data communications (e.g., text, video, multimedia).<sup>19</sup> The FirstNet Network is a single, nationwide network built for first responders and the public safety community. See **Figure 1**. The network has special features such as priority access, deployable assets that can be used during emergencies (e.g., cells on wheels), and add-on services (e.g., specialized applications or apps that can be accessed on FirstNet-enabled devices).

**Figure 1. FirstNet Network**



**Source:** CRS, adapted from FirstNet Authority, "FirstNet: A Broadband Network for Public Safety, by Public Safety," February 23, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-zyDCSaDug>; and FirstNet Authority, "Roadmap Domain: Voice Communications," 2020, [https://firstnet.gov/sites/default/files/VoiceCommunications\\_2020\\_Roadmap.pdf](https://firstnet.gov/sites/default/files/VoiceCommunications_2020_Roadmap.pdf).

**Notes:** Beyond first responders (i.e., police, fire, emergency medical services), other entities (e.g., utilities, health care, transportation) may be eligible to use the FirstNet Network. See FirstNet Built with AT&T, "FirstNet Eligibility," <https://www.firstnet.com/firstnet-eligibility.html>.

To operate on the FirstNet Network and access the services and fleet of deployable assets, public safety agencies must subscribe to the service and have a FirstNet-enabled device.<sup>20</sup> As of the fourth quarter of 2025, FirstNet reports that approximately 31,000 public safety agencies and organizations are subscribed to the FirstNet Network.<sup>21</sup> A FirstNet website states that the FirstNet Network "serves a wide range of agencies—including law enforcement, fire and rescue and

<sup>17</sup> P.L. 112-96, Title VI, §6205, and FirstNet Authority, "About PSAC," <https://firstnet.gov/about/psac>.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Parkinson, "Three Years of Public-Private Partnership for Public Safety's Network," FirstNet Authority, March 31, 2020, <https://firstnet.gov/newsroom/blog/three-years-public-private-partnership-public-safety%E2%80%99s-network>.

<sup>19</sup> See P.L. 112-96, Title VI, §6202.

<sup>20</sup> FirstNet Built with AT&T, "Agency Rate Plans," <https://www.firstnet.com/plans.html#agency-plans>.

<sup>21</sup> FirstNet Built with AT&T, "By the Numbers," January 27, 2026, <https://www.firstnet.com/content/dam/firstnet/white-papers/firstnet-by-the-numbers.pdf>.

emergency medical responders. Our support also extends to essential sectors such as utilities, military first responders, school safety, healthcare and fleet transportation.”<sup>22</sup>

Pursuant to P.L. 112-96, the FirstNet Network is built to Long Term Evolution (LTE) standards—commercial standards for cellular networks and communications.<sup>23</sup> This allows the FirstNet Network to capitalize on the features and functions of commercial cellular networks (e.g., access to the internet, video transmission) and leverages AT&T infrastructure (e.g., cell sites) to provide services nationwide.<sup>24</sup> The FirstNet Network has a dedicated public safety core that receives, encrypts, and routes FirstNet Network traffic.<sup>25</sup> It uses multiple geographically distributed core sites nationwide for enhanced redundancy and performance.<sup>26</sup> AT&T, with the FirstNet Authority, has developed compatible devices (e.g., cell phones, drones), applications (e.g., push-to-talk), and deployable equipment (e.g., cell sites on wheels) that can operate on the FirstNet Network.<sup>27</sup>

The FirstNet Network is separate and distinct from Land Mobile Radio (LMR) systems.<sup>28</sup> Whereas LMR systems offer dedicated state and local networks that provide reliable *voice* services for public safety agencies, the FirstNet Network offers a dedicated public safety network for *broadband* services, including connection to the internet and transmission of data from in-vehicle devices, handheld devices, and other technologies (e.g., drones). The FirstNet Network was designed to offer high-speed, secure data communications and access to the internet—features that LMR devices do not offer—using a federally supported nationwide cellular network customized for public safety use and available to public safety agencies at all levels of government and nationwide. The FirstNet Authority asserts that “FirstNet delivers specialized features to public safety that are not available on most commercial wireless networks today, such as priority access, preemption, more network capacity, and a resilient, hardened connection.”<sup>29</sup> In times of network congestion, such as during emergencies, *priority* means that first responders are always able to access and use the network, and when network traffic is high, *preemption* means FirstNet subscribers supersede commercial users.<sup>30</sup> The FirstNet Authority explains it as

---

<sup>22</sup> FirstNet Built with AT&T, “Your Eligibility Questions Answered,” <https://www.firstnet.com/firstnet-eligibility.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Long Term Evolution (LTE) is a global, “open, interoperable standard used by virtually all carriers. All major smartphones use LTE today.” It has special features to manage the network and traffic. “It can assign priorities to customers,” giving higher priority to first responders during emergencies. “If there is an outage, the calls will be rerouted to another path automatically and once service is restored, the network will revert back to its designed path.” See Signal Boosters, “Cellular LTE vs. 4G vs. 5G: What Is the Difference?,” May 18, 2022, <https://www.signalboosters.com/blog/lte-vs-4g-vs-5g-whats-the-difference/>.

<sup>24</sup> The FirstNet Network and traffic are managed separately from AT&T’s commercial traffic.

<sup>25</sup> The core is the infrastructure that enables communication and data exchange within the FirstNet Network. See FirstNet Authority, “The FirstNet Core,” <https://www.firstnet.gov/network/TT/firstnet-core>.

<sup>26</sup> FirstNet Authority, “The FirstNet Core,” <https://firstnet.gov/network/TT/firstnet-core>.

<sup>27</sup> FirstNet Authority, *FirstNet Operations Manual*, February 2026, [https://firstnet.gov/sites/default/files/FirstNet\\_Operations\\_Manual\\_2026\\_1.pdf](https://firstnet.gov/sites/default/files/FirstNet_Operations_Manual_2026_1.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Land Mobile Radio (LMR) networks enable first responders in that jurisdiction to communicate with dispatch, commanders, and each other. Public safety agencies work with vendors to design and build an LMR system for an agency (e.g., state police) to serve a specific area (e.g., city, county, state). Thus, there are many LMR systems, built by different agencies, using different vendors, standards, and features to meet the needs of each public safety agency and area. These are typically standalone systems, not connected to the internet. See Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, *Land Mobile Radio (LMR) 101: Part 1: Educating Decision-Makers on LMR Technology*, February 2016, [https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/LMR%20101\\_508FINAL\\_0\\_0.pdf](https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/LMR%20101_508FINAL_0_0.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> FirstNet Authority, “The Network,” <https://firstnet.gov/network>.

<sup>30</sup> See Jeff Bratcher, “Experience FirstNet: How Priority and Preemption Help Public Safety Connect When They Need It Most,” FirstNet Authority, July 16, 2020, <https://firstnet.gov/newsroom/blog/experience-firstnet-how-priority-and-preemption-help-public-safety-connect-when-they>. As part of the public-private partnership between AT&T and the FirstNet Authority, AT&T can provide services to commercial users using Band 14 (a dedicated swathe of spectrum granted to the FirstNet Authority for the FirstNet Network) on a secondary basis.

providing a “fast lane” for public safety communications.<sup>31</sup> The FirstNet Authority, with AT&T, is responsible for these functions on the FirstNet Network.

## Spectrum License

P.L. 112-96 required the FCC to grant a license to the FirstNet Authority for the use of D-Block frequencies (frequencies from 758 to 763 MHz and from 788 to 793 MHz, also known as Band 14) to enable public safety communications over the FirstNet Network for an initial term of 10 years.<sup>32</sup> This 10 megahertz swathe of spectrum is directly adjacent to 10 megahertz of another band used by public safety—the 700 MHz band; the granting of the D Block made available 20 megahertz of contiguous spectrum nationwide that is dedicated to public safety.<sup>33</sup>

The FCC granted the initial license on November 15, 2012.<sup>34</sup> Under P.L. 112-96, the FirstNet Authority was required to submit an application to the FCC for renewal, demonstrating that, during the preceding license term, it had met the duties and obligations laid out in its originating legislation, in which case, the FCC could renew for a term not to exceed 10 additional years. The FirstNet Authority filed an application with the FCC on August 22, 2022, demonstrating that it met its duties and obligations and requesting renewal for a minimum of 10 years.<sup>35</sup> On May 26, 2023, the FCC renewed the license for “ten years from the expiration of FirstNet’s initial license, or for the remaining period of its authorization from Congress, whichever is sooner.”<sup>36</sup> Further, after review of the record, the FCC concurred with the FirstNet Authority that it had met the required duties and obligations during the preceding licensing term, and the FCC stated that it would continue to monitor and oversee the FirstNet Authority’s performance.<sup>37</sup> A question may arise about the FirstNet Authority’s ability to hold this spectrum in Band 14 if its license is not reauthorized.

In October 2024, the FCC granted the FirstNet Authority access to unassigned spectrum in the 4.9 GHz band (4940-4990 MHz).<sup>38</sup> According to one stakeholder, “integrating 4.9 GHz into FirstNet could transform public safety by allowing first responders to leverage new technologies such as 5G, augmented reality, and multi-video streams in high-stakes environments.”<sup>39</sup> Prior to the granting of this spectrum to the FirstNet Authority, there were competing views on the use of this band, and these concerns have persisted. Most notably, these include state and local public safety

---

<sup>31</sup> FirstNet Authority, “The Network,” <https://firstnet.gov/network>.

<sup>32</sup> See P.L. 112-96, §6201. See also Federal Communications Commission (FCC), “700 MHz Public Safety Spectrum,” <https://www.fcc.gov/700-mhz-public-safety-narrowband-spectrum>.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Seybold, “The Value of the D Block,” *All Things FirstNet*, October 11, 2011, <https://allthingsfirstnet.com/the-value-of-the-d-block/>.

<sup>34</sup> See FCC, “Universal Licensing System,” <https://wireless2.fcc.gov/UlsApp/UlsSearch/allHistory.jsp?licKey=3422973>.

<sup>35</sup> FCC, *Application for the Renewal of Station WQQE234 License*, August 22, 2022, [https://wireless2.fcc.gov/UlsEntry/attachments/attachmentViewRD.jsp?ATTACHMENTS=EQxEP2Dk6cAB01ZvF2-VEDOJokr47lfVrSSiKkbnB4tJ0Qmy5nV\\_!1404911115!753417443?applType=search&fileKey=1785076599&attachmentKey=21560049&attachmentInd=applAttach](https://wireless2.fcc.gov/UlsEntry/attachments/attachmentViewRD.jsp?ATTACHMENTS=EQxEP2Dk6cAB01ZvF2-VEDOJokr47lfVrSSiKkbnB4tJ0Qmy5nV_!1404911115!753417443?applType=search&fileKey=1785076599&attachmentKey=21560049&attachmentInd=applAttach).

<sup>36</sup> FCC, *Renewal of SP-700 MHz Public Safety*, Order, May 26, 2023, p. 1, <https://wireless2.fcc.gov/UlsEntry/attachments/attachmentViewRD.jsp?applType=search&fileKey=40667052&attachmentKey=21765393&attachmentInd=applAttach>.

<sup>37</sup> FCC, *Renewal of SP-700 MHz Public Safety*, Order, May 26, 2023, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> FCC, *FCC Adopts New Rules for the Public Safety 4.9 GHz Band*, October 22, 2024, <https://www.fcc.gov/document/fcc-adopts-new-rules-public-safety-49-ghz-band>.

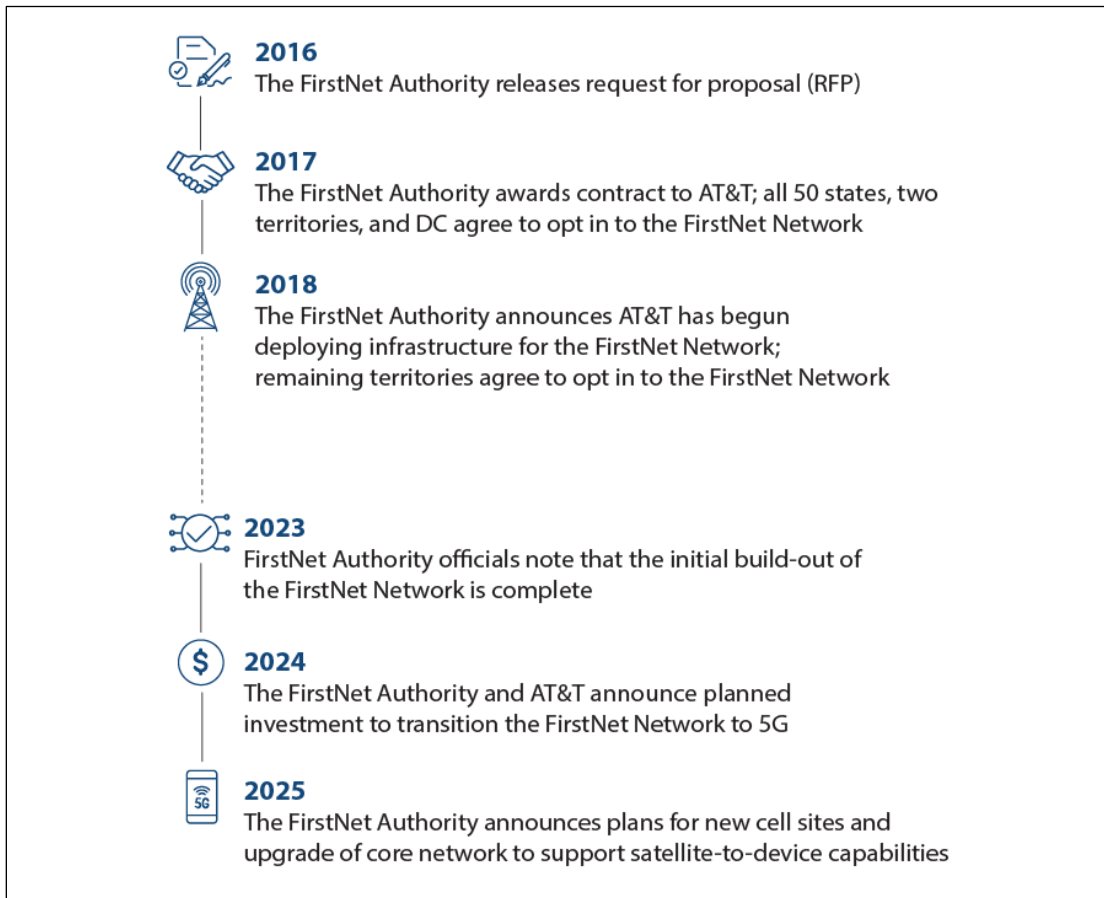
<sup>39</sup> Jesse Hall, “Exploring the Potential of 4.9 GHz FirstNet,” *MCA*, October 25, 2024, <https://lte.callmc.com/potential-4-9-ghz-firstnet/?srsltid=AfmBOor3SkzniHQI7Hy6uG1RhLPVoth9D12q-I3GuRKXt22fyuWW251F>.

agencies that hold spectrum rights in the 4.9 GHz band expressing concern about the loss of local control during emergencies and ability to expand services in their areas, wireless providers asserting that the grant gives AT&T a competitive advantage, and critical infrastructure owners who wanted access to the band arguing against the granting of additional spectrum to the FirstNet Authority.<sup>40</sup>

## Timeline of Implementation Events

The FirstNet Authority was permitted by law to enter into a public-private partnership to construct, manage, and operate the FirstNet Network.<sup>41</sup> Events surrounding FirstNet Network implementation from 2016 to 2025 are shown in **Figure 2**.

**Figure 2. FirstNet Network Implementation Timeline**



**Source:** CRS, adapted from FirstNet Built with AT&T, “History of FirstNet,” <https://www.firstnet.com/public-safety-first.html>.

<sup>40</sup> For more information, see CRS In Focus IF12766, *4.9 GHz Public Safety Band: Competing Views on Use*, by Jill C. Gallagher.

<sup>41</sup> P.L. 112-96, §6206(b), encouraged requests for proposals (RFPs) to leverage, to the maximum extent economically desirable, existing commercial wireless infrastructure to speed deployment of the network.

The FirstNet Authority released a request for proposal (RFP) on January 13, 2016.<sup>42</sup> The RFP asked bidders to provide innovative solutions for achieving 16 high-level objectives.<sup>43</sup> AT&T won the bid, and in March 2017, the FirstNet Authority awarded a 25-year, \$6.5 billion contract to the company to build, operate, maintain, and improve the FirstNet Network.<sup>44</sup>

As part of the public-private partnership, the FirstNet Authority provided 20 megahertz of spectrum (Band 14)—a valuable resource that AT&T can use to provide services to public safety users on a primary basis and to commercial users on a secondary basis. AT&T is providing the FirstNet Authority access to its infrastructure, valued at \$180 billion.<sup>45</sup> AT&T is to spend \$40 billion over the 25 years of the contract to fulfill its obligations.<sup>46</sup> AT&T is to make annual payments to the FirstNet Authority to ensure self-sustainability of the FirstNet Network.<sup>47</sup>

P.L. 112-96 required that state governors be given the choice to opt in to the FirstNet Network. This meant that AT&T would build out the FirstNet Network in states that opted in or that states that opted out would build their own interoperable first responder network with funding from FirstNet to offset costs. By January 2018, all 50 states, five territories, and the District of Columbia had agreed to opt in to the FirstNet Network build-out,<sup>48</sup> meaning that AT&T would be responsible for deploying the FirstNet Network in all jurisdictions. As a condition of the contract, the FirstNet Authority and AT&T developed an initial five-year build-out agreement with specific milestones (e.g., deployment dates, a particular percentage of rural build-out per year, subscriber figures) that AT&T was required to meet to receive payments.<sup>49</sup>

On March 27, 2018, the FirstNet Authority announced that AT&T had begun deploying infrastructure in each jurisdiction, following plans developed in coordination with in the jurisdictions' officials. At its May 2023 board meeting, FirstNet Authority officials noted that the initial build-out of the FirstNet Network, as specified in the contract, was complete.<sup>50</sup> In February 2024, the FirstNet Authority and AT&T announced a planned investment of more than \$8 billion over 10 years to transition the FirstNet Network to 5G.<sup>51</sup> In December 2025, plans were

---

<sup>42</sup> The RFP (North American Industry Classification System Code: 517210) is available at <https://sam.gov/opp/7806696f4340f16474647ccc57805040/view>.

<sup>43</sup> See U.S. Department of the Interior, Business Center and FirstNet Authority, *Solicitation No. D15PS00295 – Section C, Statement of Objectives*, [https://sam.gov/api/prod/opps/v3/opportunities/resources/files/f980fdc9c77fbd9cbeea0d78b3ccb22b/download?api\\_key=null&status=archived&token=](https://sam.gov/api/prod/opps/v3/opportunities/resources/files/f980fdc9c77fbd9cbeea0d78b3ccb22b/download?api_key=null&status=archived&token=).

<sup>44</sup> FirstNet Authority, “FirstNet Partners with AT&T to Build Wireless Broadband Network for America’s First Responders,” press release, March 30, 2017, <https://firstnet.gov/newsroom/press-releases/firstnet-partners-att-build-wireless-broadband-network-americas-first>.

<sup>45</sup> See P.L. 112-96, §6206(b)(1)(C).

<sup>46</sup> FirstNet Authority, “FirstNet Partners with AT&T to Build Wireless Broadband Network for America’s First Responders,” March 30, 2017, <https://firstnet.gov/newsroom/press-releases/firstnet-partners-att-build-wireless-broadband-network-americas-first>.

<sup>47</sup> FirstNet Authority, *FirstNet Authority: Federal Oversight and Validation of the FirstNet Network*, 2022, p. 1, <https://www.firstnet.gov/sites/default/files/FirstNet%20Authority%20Oversight%20and%20Validation%2015-2022.pdf>.

<sup>48</sup> This decision centered on which entity would build out the FirstNet Network—the state or AT&T.

<sup>49</sup> AT&T, *2017 Annual Report*, p. 85, [https://investors.att.com/~/\\_media/Files/A/ATT-IR-V2/financial-reports/annual-reports/2017/complete-2017-annual-report.pdf](https://investors.att.com/~/_media/Files/A/ATT-IR-V2/financial-reports/annual-reports/2017/complete-2017-annual-report.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> FirstNet Authority, “Combined Board and Board Committees Meeting,” May 23, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aacZgLdLOkY>. (See statements by Jocelyn Moore starting at 19:20.)

<sup>51</sup> Ryan Oremland, “FirstNet Authority, AT&T Announce 10-Year Investment to Transform America’s Public Safety Broadband Network,” FirstNet Authority, February 13, 2024, <https://www.firstnet.gov/newsroom/press-releases/firstnet-authority-att-announce-10-year-investment-transform-americas>.

announced to further expand the FirstNet Network and strengthen wireless coverage through new cell sites and the usage of satellite-to-device capabilities.<sup>52</sup>

Statutory authorization for the FirstNet Authority is set to expire on February 22, 2027, meaning it would no longer oversee the FirstNet Network.<sup>53</sup> While the FirstNet Network itself is not at risk of expiration, its future would be uncertain as there is no default entity designated to oversee the FirstNet Network or the contract with AT&T—which runs through 2042—in the event reauthorization does not occur.

## Selected Policy Issues and Options for Congress

The 119<sup>th</sup> Congress has considered the reauthorization of the FirstNet Authority through hearings and legislative proposals.<sup>54</sup> Congress may also consider related issues, such as market competition and the current state of interoperability and interconnection of the FirstNet Network with other networks (including 911 systems).

### Reauthorization of the FirstNet Authority

Regarding reauthorization of the FirstNet Authority, Congress has a range of options. These could include (1) extending the reauthorization date but retaining a sunset date to allow for periodic review by Congress, (2) removing the sunset date and permanently reauthorizing the FirstNet Authority, or (3) not reauthorizing the FirstNet Authority. Each of these options is discussed below.

#### Extending the Reauthorization Date

Congress could reauthorize the FirstNet Authority and choose another sunset date. For instance, the First Responder Network Authority Reauthorization Act of 2026 (H.R. 7386), introduced in the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress, would reauthorize the FirstNet Authority through September 30, 2037. While stakeholders largely support the FirstNet Network, some have raised issues with certain aspects relating to the FirstNet Authority and FirstNet Network and have advocated for the authorization to remain on a “Congressionally mandated cycle” to ensure revisitation.<sup>55</sup> Choosing this option would mean that Congress would need to consider reauthorization of the FirstNet Authority again in the future.

---

<sup>52</sup> Ryan Oremland, “FirstNet Authority to Expand Network, Boost Coverage For Public Safety with More Sites, Satellite Connectivity,” FirstNet Authority, December 19, 2025, <https://firstnet.gov/newsroom/press-releases/firstnet-authority-expand-network-boost-coverage-public-safety-more-sites>.

<sup>53</sup> See §6206(f).

<sup>54</sup> For example, the First Responder Network Authority Reauthorization Act of 2026 (H.R. 7386) was introduced on February 10, 2026, and a hearing was held by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on January 28, 2026, regarding the progress of the FirstNet Network in preparation for the reauthorization debate. See U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Media, *On the Front Lines of Connectivity: Examining FirstNet’s Role in Public Safety*, hearings, 119<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., January 28, 2026, [https://www.commerce.senate.gov/2026/1/evaluating-progress-reauthorization-of-the-federal-public-safety-communications-system\\_2](https://www.commerce.senate.gov/2026/1/evaluating-progress-reauthorization-of-the-federal-public-safety-communications-system_2).

<sup>55</sup> For example, see letter from Jeff Norman, President, National Sheriffs’ Association, and Chris West, President, Major Cities Chiefs Association, to Rep. Brett Guthrie and Rep. Frank Pallone, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, January 21, 2026, p. 1, <https://majorcitieschiefs.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/012126-FNA-Reauthorization-Letters-MCCA-and-NSA.pdf>.

## Removing the Sunset Date and Permanently Reauthorizing

Congress could also choose to reauthorize the FirstNet Authority and not to set a sunset date. This could be achieved through legislation that provides permanent reauthorization and/or repeals the sunset language in P.L. 112-96. Legislation to repeal the sunset language was introduced in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress (see H.R. 3366).<sup>56</sup> Pursuit of such a legislative path would authorize the FirstNet Authority to continue to operate and oversee the network without an end date, lending certainty to the future of the FirstNet Network. This approach is supported by some public safety stakeholders, who assert that the expiration of authority was added by Congress because of uncertainty about whether the FirstNet Network would work but that since it does, “there is no need to set another time limit.”<sup>57</sup> While repealing the sunset provision would ultimately remove the need for reauthorization, choosing this option would remove the scheduled opportunity for Congress to periodically review and assess the network.<sup>58</sup>

## Choosing Not to Reauthorize and Allowing to Sunset

Congress could choose not to reauthorize the FirstNet Authority. This may raise questions over how (and if) the network would continue to operate or whether there might be loss of service, as Congress did not designate another federal entity to assume responsibilities after the sunset date. If a loss of service occurs, it would affect the more than 30,000 public safety agencies and organizations that use the FirstNet Network.<sup>59</sup> In a survey commissioned by the Public Safety Broadband Technology Association, “78% of the respondents said the ‘added costs to develop contingency plans’ was among the fears they have about Congress failing to act on FirstNet Authority reauthorization.”<sup>60</sup> Some providers do offer services similar to the FirstNet Network, though they do not have access to the same dedicated spectrum and do not provide continuous priority coverage for first responders.<sup>61</sup> The loss of a dedicated network for public safety may also lead first responders to experience concerns such as those reported before the creation of FirstNet, including the interoperability issues during the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

## Organizational Structure of FirstNet

When Congress is considering whether to reauthorize the FirstNet Authority, options may include (1) keeping the FirstNet Authority within NTIA, (2) establishing the FirstNet Authority as a separate federal entity, or (3) moving the FirstNet Authority to another federal agency. In reauthorizing the FirstNet Authority, Congress may also consider revisiting its internal organization.

---

<sup>56</sup> There has been no legislation introduced in the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress to repeal the sunset language.

<sup>57</sup> James Careless, “Why FirstNet Reauthorization Matters for Public Safety Communications,” *All Things FirstNet*, March 11, 2025, <https://allthingsfirstnet.com/articles/firstnet-authority-reauthorization-public-safety-communication/>.

<sup>58</sup> Even if this option were chosen, Congress could still conduct oversight through hearings.

<sup>59</sup> FirstNet Built with AT&T, “By the Numbers,” April 23, 2025, <https://www.firstnet.com/content/dam/firstnet/white-papers/firstnet-by-the-numbers.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> Donny Jackson, “FirstNet Authority Reauthorization Backed: PSBTA Survey,” *Urgent Communications*, November 12, 2025, <https://urgentcomm.com/public-safety/firstnet-authority-reauthorization-backed-psbta-survey>.

<sup>61</sup> James Careless, “First Responders Overwhelmingly Support Reauthorization of FirstNet,” *All Things FirstNet*, November 12, 2025, <https://allthingsfirstnet.com/first-responders-overwhelmingly-support-reauthorization-of-firstnet/>.

## Maintaining Current Structure of FirstNet Within NTIA

Currently, the FirstNet Authority operates as an independent authority within NTIA,<sup>62</sup> and NTIA is tasked with reporting on the FirstNet Authority's activities to the appropriate congressional oversight committees. The reports NTIA delivers to Congress must contain comprehensive information on the operations, activities, financial condition, and accomplishments of the FirstNet Authority and recommendations or proposals for legislative action, as deemed appropriate.<sup>63</sup>

The Secretary of Commerce was charged with, in part, appointing the 12 nonpermanent members to the FirstNet Authority Board, including its chairperson, and conducting audits of the FirstNet Authority on an annual basis. In 2022, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) evaluated the option of keeping the FirstNet Authority within NTIA,<sup>64</sup> which is not expected to trigger new operational costs. This arrangement may continue to affect the FirstNet Authority's ability to independently oversee and manage the network. For example, P.L. 112-96 directed NTIA to borrow money from the Treasury to administer grants to states for network build-out and review lease fees on an annual basis from any entity seeking access to or use of FirstNet equipment or infrastructure. Because of its current placement within NTIA, the FirstNet Authority is required to follow NTIA's standard operating procedure, which the FirstNet Authority's officials believe constrains its independent decisionmaking ability.<sup>65</sup>

As reported by GAO, members of the FirstNet Authority Board have expressed uncertainty as to whether the FirstNet Authority's CEO and staff are accountable to the board or to NTIA.<sup>66</sup> NTIA officials stated that DOC delegated its statutory responsibilities to NTIA, and NTIA has ongoing financial oversight over the FirstNet Authority's duties (e.g., annually approving user fees).<sup>67</sup> In February 4, 2026, testimony to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, NTIA's Associate Administrator for Public Safety Communications, Michael E. Dame, stated that "FirstNet's operational 'independence' has blurred" the lines of authority and accountability with NTIA and DOC.<sup>68</sup> Dame proposed increasing the roles of NTIA and DOC in the affairs of the FirstNet Authority (i.e., increased involvement in contract performance, compliance, and reinvestment decisions) to enhance oversight.<sup>69</sup> The witness representing the FirstNet Authority, the Acting Board Chair, Sheriff Michael A. Adkinson Jr., stated that the "roles and responsibilities of NTIA, the Board, and the Authority are not well defined in the statute" and proposed that Congress clarify the chain of command among these three entities.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> FirstNet Authority, "About Us," <https://firstnet.gov/about>.

<sup>63</sup> P.L. 112-96, §6210.

<sup>64</sup> Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Public-Safety Broadband Network: Congressional Action Required to Ensure Network Continuity*, GAO-22-104915, February 22, 2022, p. 21, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-22-104915>.

<sup>65</sup> GAO, *Public-Safety Broadband Network: Congressional Action Required to Ensure Network Continuity*, GAO-22-104915, p. 17.

<sup>66</sup> GAO, *Public-Safety Broadband Network: Congressional Action Required to Ensure Network Continuity*, GAO-22-104915, p. 17.

<sup>67</sup> GAO, *Public-Safety Broadband Network: Congressional Action Required to Ensure Network Continuity*, GAO-22-104915, p. 17.

<sup>68</sup> Written statement of Michael E. Dame, Associate Administrator for Public Safety Communications, NTIA, in U.S. Congress, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, *Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization*, hearings, 119<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., February 4, 2026, p. 3, <https://www.congress.gov/119/meeting/house/118924/witnesses/HHRG-119-IF16-Bio-DameM-20260204.pdf>.

<sup>69</sup> Dame, Statement in *Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization*, p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> Written statement of Michael A. Adkinson Jr., Acting Board Chair of the FirstNet Authority, in U.S. Congress, (continued...)

P.L. 112-96 directs DOC to contract with an independent auditor to conduct annual reviews of the FirstNet Authority. DOC's OIG conducted 24 audits from 2014 to 2025 on topics such as managing financial disclosures and contracts, workforce and recruiting challenges, improving the grant process, oversight of reinvestments, whistleblower retaliation, interference with audits, and network performance and connectivity.<sup>71</sup> Congress may consider the FirstNet Authority's prior performance as an independent authority when deciding the future structure of FirstNet. A 2025 OIG investigation found examples of misconduct and revealed that FirstNet Authority officials interfered with OIG audits. Some members of the public safety community expressed concerns about the seeming lack of transparency and accountability of the FirstNet Authority to the leadership of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce. The FirstNet Authority relayed to the OIG that it had new leadership, the "individuals involved in the investigation are no longer employed," and "counseling was provided to those who remain."<sup>72</sup>

Some legislation has been introduced during the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress that would keep the FirstNet Authority within NTIA. For instance, H.R. 7386 would eliminate its independent authority but maintain the FirstNet Authority under NTIA. Another bill, the Public Safety Communications Act (H.R. 1519), would provide statutory authority for NTIA's Office of Public Safety Communications, which manages the FirstNet Authority. While some Members state that H.R. 1519 would not result in structural changes to FirstNet, some public safety stakeholders disagree, expressing concerns about the ability of the FirstNet Authority Board—which includes members from the public safety sector—to continue making decisions about its network and future investments if the bill were enacted.<sup>73</sup> In testimony to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on January 28, 2026, the Acting Board Chair of the FirstNet Authority noted the FirstNet Authority's desire to increase the number of public safety officials on the FirstNet Authority Board and to stagger terms of board members for continuity.<sup>74</sup> For that same hearing, the AT&T president testified that "AT&T welcomes the rigorous oversight" of the FirstNet Authority brought by promoting the continuity and public safety experience of members of the FirstNet Authority Board.<sup>75</sup>

---

House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, *Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization*, hearings, 119<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., February 4, 2026, p. 5, <https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2026-02/1.27.2026%20Sheriff%20Adkinson%20Statement%20for%20the%20Record.pdf>.

<sup>71</sup> Department of Commerce, Office of Inspector General, "Reports," <https://www.oig.doc.gov/reports/?keywords=&bureau=First+Responder+Network+Authority&type=&number=&min=&max=>.

<sup>72</sup> Department of Commerce, Office of Inspector General, "Investigation into Allegations That FirstNet Authority Senior Officials Interfered with OIG Audits," August 28, 2025, [https://www.oig.doc.gov/wp-content/OIGPublications/Public\\_Investigative\\_Summary\\_24-0175\\_SECURED.pdf](https://www.oig.doc.gov/wp-content/OIGPublications/Public_Investigative_Summary_24-0175_SECURED.pdf).

<sup>73</sup> See Donny Jackson, "FirstNet Authority Reauthorization Letters Offer Differing Views," *Urgent Communications*, January 21, 2026, <https://urgentcomm.com/legislation/firstnet-authority-reauthorization-letters-offer-differing-views>; and letter from Patrick Yoes, National President, Fraternal Order of Police, to Rep. S. Brett Guthrie and Rep. Frank J. Pallone, December 16, 2025, <https://fop.net/letter/opposition-to-h-r-1519-the-public-safety-communications-act/>.

<sup>74</sup> Written statement of Michael A. Adkinson Jr., Acting Board Chair of the FirstNet Authority, in U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Media, *On the Front Lines of Connectivity: Examining FirstNet's Role in Public Safety*, hearings, 119<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., January 28, 2026, p. 5., <https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2026-02/1.27.2026%20Sheriff%20Adkinson%20Statement%20for%20the%20Record.pdf>.

<sup>75</sup> Written statement of Scott Agnew, President, FirstNet and Public Sector Mobility AT&T, in U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Media, *On the Front Lines of Connectivity: Examining FirstNet's Role in Public Safety*, hearings, 119<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., January 28, 2026, p. 7, <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/services/files/20E7157F-954C-48FF-B992-010B61003DFF>.

## Establishing FirstNet as a Separate Federal Entity

Congress established the FirstNet Authority as a self-sustaining entity that reinvests the funds it receives from fees into the construction, maintenance, operations, and improvements of the FirstNet Network.<sup>76</sup> The FirstNet Authority receives support from DOC in matters of mission support services and oversight, such as NTIA's borrowing \$2 billion from the U.S. Treasury and reimbursing it to help the FirstNet Authority coordinate grants with state and local public safety entities and appointing members to the FirstNet Authority Board, including designating the board's chair.<sup>77</sup> In the House Committee on Energy and Commerce hearing on February 4, 2026, NTIA's Associate Administrator for Public Safety Communications stated that NTIA relies on the expertise of the FirstNet Authority Board and PSAC in the FirstNet Authority's daily activities (i.e., technology implementation plans, budgetary decisions, and reinvestments) but provides performance accountability during and after decisions are made.<sup>78</sup>

Congress could make the FirstNet Authority an independent federal agency. While this would give the FirstNet Authority more autonomy over its reinvestment policies and decisions, there may be operational implications and new costs to consider when creating a new federal agency (e.g., staffing).

In a 2017 congressional hearing, the CEO of the FirstNet Authority stated that its independence contributed to its "flexibility and speed" in deploying communication assets.<sup>79</sup> At the time, the CEO believed that the original language authorizing the FirstNet Authority was not intended to make FirstNet its own agency and that there was not "a particular need right now" to make the FirstNet Authority an independent entity.<sup>80</sup> This perspective appears to have shifted. At the February 4, 2026, hearing, FirstNet Authority representatives expressed a preference for reauthorization language to clarify the statutory roles and responsibilities of the FirstNet Authority, its board, and NTIA and to expand the presence of public safety officials on the board.<sup>81</sup>

In deciding whether to make the FirstNet Authority an independent federal agency, Congress may consider instituting oversight mechanisms for an independent FirstNet Authority (i.e., establishing an OIG within an independent FirstNet Authority).

## Moving FirstNet to Another Federal Agency

Another option Congress may assess is moving the FirstNet Authority to another federal agency. If Congress chooses this option, it may wish to consider federal agencies whose missions include public safety or emergency communications (e.g., the Department of Homeland Security). Placing the FirstNet Authority within a federal agency that has a specific focus on public safety could facilitate integration with existing disaster response frameworks (e.g., the Federal

---

<sup>76</sup> P.L. 112-96.

<sup>77</sup> GAO, *Public-Safety Broadband Network: Congressional Action Required to Ensure Network Continuity*, GAO-22-104915, p. 17, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104915.pdf>.

<sup>78</sup> P.L. 112-96. U.S. Congress, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, *Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization*, hearings, 119<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., February 4, 2026, <https://www.congress.gov/event/119th-congress/house-event/118924>.

<sup>79</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, *Oversight of FirstNet: State Perspectives*, hearings, 115<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., November 1, 2017, pp. 76-77, <https://www.congress.gov/event/115th-congress/house-event/106569>.

<sup>80</sup> House Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, *Oversight of FirstNet: State Perspective*, hearings, p. 77.

<sup>81</sup> Adkinson, Statement in *On the Front Lines of Connectivity*, p. 5.

Emergency Management Agency).<sup>82</sup> This option may not address concerns related to the independence of the FirstNet Authority. According to GAO, “FirstNet [Authority] officials and some stakeholders told us that they do not see any advantages to being placed within another federal agency other than the Department of Commerce.”<sup>83</sup> Other considerations of moving the FirstNet Authority to another agency could include whether there would be new costs involved, whether there might be a loss or gain of dedicated expertise, and whether there might be an effect on the FirstNet Authority contract and operations during the transition period.

## Market Competition

With the FirstNet Authority’s authorization expiring in February 2027, other telecommunications industry service providers that offer public safety communications services (i.e., T-Mobile and Verizon) have questioned AT&T’s role in the FirstNet Network. While the law authorizing the FirstNet Authority does not prohibit it from contracting with multiple commercial service providers, AT&T was the only competitive bidder<sup>84</sup> that responded to the FirstNet Authority’s RFP.<sup>85</sup>

Some public safety officials have expressed concerns over certain decisions by the FirstNet Authority to expand access to the network to users outside the public safety community. For example, the National Sheriffs’ Association and Major Cities Chiefs Association wrote to the FirstNet Authority asking for the percentage of the FirstNet Network users that are not first responders after finding that the FirstNet Authority reportedly expanded access and provided network priority and preemption to non-public-safety entities.<sup>86</sup> Others, such as the Arizona Trucking Association, whose members may qualify for the FirstNet Network, support the expanded access to the FirstNet Network, as it mitigates against disruptions to trucking companies’ ability to communicate with their drivers during and after disasters.<sup>87</sup> While private stakeholders have not directly responded to this, FirstNet Authority expanding its subscriber network access increases AT&T’s share over the public safety communications market.

Since the creation of the FirstNet Network, AT&T has claimed to lead the market in public safety communications. While all states, all territories, and the District of Columbia have opted in to the FirstNet Network, public agencies within those jurisdictions are not automatically subscribed to the FirstNet Network and instead must pay for their own subscriptions.<sup>88</sup> Thus, public agencies seeking to use a public safety broadband network could turn to Verizon or T-Mobile, both of

---

<sup>82</sup> For example, see Federal Emergency Management Agency, “National Response Framework,” <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/frameworks/response>.

<sup>83</sup> GAO, *Public-Safety Broadband Network: Congressional Action Required to Ensure Network Continuity*, GAO-22-104915, p. 19, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104915.pdf>.

<sup>84</sup> Eyrageon Eidam, “FirstNet Taps Telecom Giant AT&T for First Responder Network Buildout,” March 30, 2017, <https://www.govtech.com/network/firstnet-taps-telecom-giant-att-for-first-responder-network-buildout.html>.

<sup>85</sup> FirstNet Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN), “Solicitation Number: D15PS00295E,” January 13, 2016, [https://web.archive.org/web/20170127003527/https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&tab=core&id=7806696f4340f16474647ccc57805040&\\_cview=0](https://web.archive.org/web/20170127003527/https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&tab=core&id=7806696f4340f16474647ccc57805040&_cview=0).

<sup>86</sup> Letter from Jonathan Thompson, Executive Director, National Sheriffs’ Association, and Laura Cooper, Executive Director, Major Cities Chiefs Association to Joseph Wassel, CEO, FirstNet Authority, April 14, 2023, <https://majorcitieschiefs.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/2023.04.14-MCCA-and-NSA-FirstNet-Operations-Letter.pdf>. The letter named truckers, cable companies, and maintenance personnel as examples of these entities.

<sup>87</sup> All Things FirstNet, “Arizona Trucking Association Announces FirstNet as a Member Benefit,” September 21, 2021, <https://allthingsfirstnet.com/arizona-trucking-association-announces-firstnet-as-a-member-benefit/>.

<sup>88</sup> Alicia Loh, “The State of FirstNet, America’s Public Safety Broadband Network,” *Lawfare*, April 16, 2019, <https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/state-firstnet-americas-public-safety-broadband-network>.

which allocate a portion of their 5G networks to public safety users who subscribe to their private networks.

T-Mobile offers T-Priority, which gives first responders priority access to its 5G network during emergencies. For instance, T-Priority was activated for the Los Angeles Fire Department during the 2025 wildfires; T-Mobile also provided the department with Wi-Fi routers, hot spots, and 5G antennas.<sup>89</sup> As another example, the City of New York entered into a five-year contract with T-Mobile to use T-priority on city-issued mobile devices. The contract includes reduced rates for cellular phone plans for city government workers who use T-Mobile.<sup>90</sup> T-Mobile claims to have more 5G coverage than AT&T and Verizon and faster connectivity.<sup>91</sup> T-Mobile offers services to businesses and state, local, and federal agencies.

In March 2018, Verizon created its own public safety network, Frontline, to compete with the FirstNet Network.<sup>92</sup> Verizon Frontline is a subsection of Verizon's network designated for public safety agencies.<sup>93</sup> Verizon says that Frontline automatically prioritizes first responder voice and data communications and preempts nonemergency communications.<sup>94</sup> Frontline provides public safety agencies with a 5G in-vehicle router and appears to allow agencies to scale up or scale down network function in real time.<sup>95</sup> Verizon offers its Frontline program in select communities (e.g., Los Angeles, CA; Washington, DC; Chicago, IL; Miami, FL; and Kansas City, MO).<sup>96</sup>

AT&T's FirstNet Network contract is scheduled to terminate in 2042. Congress could consider supporting enhanced competition within the FirstNet Network in any reauthorization legislation. In a congressional hearing on September 9, 2025, some Members expressed concerns about an overreliance on a single network when disasters occur.<sup>97</sup> In the February 4, 2026, House Committee on Energy and Commerce hearing, the ranking member, Representative Doris Matsui, stated that Congress "should look for ways to enable innovation and spur competition."<sup>98</sup> The chairman of the committee, Representative Richard Hudson, announced that he does not expect the reauthorization legislation to jeopardize AT&T's current contract with the FirstNet Network.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Global Compact Network USA, "5G and Public Safety: Transforming Emergency Response with T-Priority," February 21, 2025, <https://www.globalcompactusa.org/3bl-news-feed?mid=1286081&pgno=1&fdpgno=1>.

<sup>90</sup> New York City, "Mayor Adams and Chief Technology Officer Fraser Announce T-Mobile as Major Carrier for City of New York, Saving Taxpayers Millions of Dollars Each Year," February 24, 2025, <https://www.nyc.gov/mayors-office/news/2025/02/mayor-adams-chief-technology-officer-fraser-t-mobile-major-carrier-city-new>.

<sup>91</sup> T-Mobile, "T-Mobile Introduces 'T-Priority' Featuring the World's First Network Slice for First Responders," September 18, 2024, <https://www.t-mobile.com/news/business/t-priority-network-slice-for-first-responders>.

<sup>92</sup> The FirstNet Network's public safety core network is physically separate from AT&T's commercial core network; traffic to FirstNet uses different hardware. Verizon Frontline uses the same hardware for its commercial and public safety core networks. AT&T and Verizon both believe that their system structures create more network security. Loh, "The State of FirstNet, America's Public Safety Broadband Network."

<sup>93</sup> Verizon states that its Frontline program serves more than 40,000 public agencies. Verizon, "Verizon Frontline Network Slice," <https://www.verizon.com/business/solutions/public-sector/public-safety/5g-innovations/network-slice/>.

<sup>94</sup> Verizon, "Verizon Frontline," <https://www.verizon.com/business/solutions/public-sector/public-safety/>.

<sup>95</sup> Verizon, "Verizon Frontline Network Slice."

<sup>96</sup> Verizon, "Verizon Frontline Network Slice Launches Coast-to-Coast," April 24, 2025, <https://www.verizon.com/about/news/verizon-frontline-network-slice-launches>.

<sup>97</sup> U.S. Congress, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, *Public Safety Communications in the United States*, hearings, 119<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., September 9, 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/event/119th-congress/house-event/118575>.

<sup>98</sup> House Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, *Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization*, hearings.

<sup>99</sup> Jimm Phillips, "Hudson Drafting FirstNet Reauthorization Proposal That's Unlikely to Affect AT&T Operation," (continued...)

Representative Hudson said “there’s no reason to reopen debate” on AT&T’s operation of the FirstNet Network. In contrast, Senators questioned AT&T’s role as the sole operator of the FirstNet Network in the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation hearing on public safety communications on January 28, 2026.

Representatives from T-Mobile and Verizon have stated that relying on only one provider for public safety communications could increase the possibility of a network failure.<sup>100</sup> A Verizon official suggested opening the FirstNet Network’s infrastructure to other service providers to offer resiliency in the event that one provider experiences an outage.<sup>101</sup> Some emergency management departments may use multiple public safety communications networks in case one network is not operable. For example, the Chatham County, North Carolina, Emergency Operations Center uses FirstNet as well as the T-Mobile and Verizon public safety networks.<sup>102</sup>

Options for Congress could include

- directing the FirstNet Authority to allow other public safety communications network providers to access its infrastructure;
- limiting access to certain events, such as a disaster or network outage;
- requiring NTIA to educate federal, state, and local entities on the different public safety communications network providers;
- encouraging federal, state, and local agencies to conduct competitive procurement of public safety network services,<sup>103</sup> and
- requiring NTIA to inform federal, state, and local entities about the different public safety communications network providers that are available.

Providing different network options for public safety communications may promote market competition. Potential public safety network users may find it difficult to decide which network to choose as they consider the cost of different systems, devices, and coverage among the different network options.<sup>104</sup>

Multiple public safety communications networks could lack interoperability, impairing frontline communications.<sup>105</sup> In an oversight hearing by the House Committee on Energy and Commerce in 2017, one Member noted that “if other providers want to offer services to first responders, they need to be fully interoperable.”<sup>106</sup> In the hearing, a public safety official emphasized the need for

---

January 21, 2026, [https://communicationsdaily.com/article/2026/01/21/hudson-drafting-firstnet-reauthorization-proposal-thats-unlikely-to-affect-att-operation-2601200065?BC=bc\\_697776e8c1b07](https://communicationsdaily.com/article/2026/01/21/hudson-drafting-firstnet-reauthorization-proposal-thats-unlikely-to-affect-att-operation-2601200065?BC=bc_697776e8c1b07).

<sup>100</sup> Greg Walden and Henry Waxman, “First Responders Deserve a Refreshed FirstNet,” *RealClearPolicy*, September 24, 2025, [https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2025/09/24/first\\_responders\\_deserve\\_a\\_refreshed\\_firstnet\\_1136806.html](https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2025/09/24/first_responders_deserve_a_refreshed_firstnet_1136806.html).

<sup>101</sup> Senate Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Media Subcommittee, *On the Front Lines of Connectivity*, hearings.

<sup>102</sup> House Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, *Public Safety Communications in the United States*, hearings.

<sup>103</sup> Written testimony of Cory Davis, Vice President, Verizon Frontline, in U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Media, *On the Front Lines of Connectivity: Examining FirstNet’s Role in Public Safety*, hearings, 119<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., January 28, 2026, p. 7.

<sup>104</sup> RAND Corporation, *Broadband Communication Prioritization and Interoperability Guidance for Law Enforcement*, 2022, p. 53, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b7ea2794cde7a79e7c00582/t/630f52b73864884d3f492d97/1661948602148/BROADBAND+POLICING.pdf>.

<sup>105</sup> Loh, “The State of FirstNet, America’s Public Safety Broadband Network.”

<sup>106</sup> House Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, *Oversight of FirstNet*, hearings.

interoperability, such as including “open and nonproprietary devices and applications ... to all providers.”<sup>107</sup> An AT&T representative countered that introducing interoperability among different providers’ core networks increases the risk of cybersecurity vulnerabilities.<sup>108</sup> In more recent hearings in the Senate and House in 2026, AT&T stated that its current project—FirstNet Fusion<sup>109</sup>—could address interoperability concerns, making the FirstNet Network interoperable with LMR networks, regardless of the service provider.<sup>110</sup>

If Congress chooses to take action to increase the competition within the FirstNet Network or across public safety networks more generally, it may consider oversight into the interoperability and security of multiple companies’ products.

## Integration with Next Generation 911

For decades, the 911 system has operated using legacy infrastructure (i.e., telephone calls through the public switched telephone network). In the 2000s, local governments and public safety officials identified the need to keep pace with emerging communications technologies and communication formats that consumers use in daily life (e.g., texts, videos, photos). To that end, some public safety answering points (PSAPs, also known as 911 centers) are upgrading their infrastructure to internet-protocol-based systems—referred to as Next Generation 911 (NG911). When fully transitioned, NG911 is anticipated to enhance emergency response service, making it easier for the public to report emergency needs and for first responders to receive information. This includes multimedia transmissions—such as text messages, streaming video, and photos—directly from the public to PSAPs.

The FirstNet Network and NG911 are being deployed as separate networks—but together they have the potential to enhance emergency response.<sup>111</sup> According to the FirstNet Authority, “the FirstNet network lays the ground work for the future integration of [NG911] technologies to forever change the way telecommunicators do their jobs. In the [anticipated] NG911 and FirstNet integrated PSAP, FirstNet is the network solution that provides the pipe that first responders can use to communicate with the most advanced capabilities available today.”<sup>112</sup> Some public safety stakeholders have already been working toward integrating the two systems.<sup>113</sup> For example, in 2023 the National 911 Program—housed within the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA; within the U.S. Department of Transportation)—convened a group of public- and private-sector representatives to address interconnection of the two networks by developing example contract language around technical requirements and establishing goals to

---

<sup>107</sup> House Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, *Oversight of FirstNet*, hearings.

<sup>108</sup> House Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, *Oversight of FirstNet*, hearings.

<sup>109</sup> FirstNet, “FirstNet Fusion,” <https://www.firstnet.com/mission-critical/firstnet-fusion.html>.

<sup>110</sup> Senate Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Media, *On the Front Lines of Connectivity*, hearings; and House Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, *Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization*, hearings.

<sup>111</sup> Mission Critical Partners, a provider of technical and operational public safety consulting services, envisions that the two networks “will form a standards-based, broadband, end-to-end public safety communications platform to enable connection between the public, the PSAP [public safety answering point], and first responders.” See Mission Critical Partners, *Planning Considerations for Interfacing Emergency Communications Centers with First Responder Network Authority’s Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network*, October 2019, p. 7, [https://az911.gov/sites/default/files/State%20of%20Arizona\\_Guidelines%20for%20PSAP-ECC%20Integration\\_24OCT2019\\_Final.pdf](https://az911.gov/sites/default/files/State%20of%20Arizona_Guidelines%20for%20PSAP-ECC%20Integration_24OCT2019_Final.pdf).

<sup>112</sup> FirstNet Authority, “The Next Generation of 911,” <https://firstnet.gov/newsroom/videos/next-generation-911>. Section 6206(b)(2)(C) of P.L. 112-96 requires the FirstNet Authority to promote integration of the FirstNet Network with PSAPs.

<sup>113</sup> 911.gov, “911 & FirstNet,” October 20, 2023, <https://www.911.gov/issues/911-and-firstnet/>.

facilitate progress.<sup>114</sup> In 2023, Tennessee became the first state to integrate FirstNet (with AT&T ESInet)<sup>115</sup> for backup and resiliency purposes.<sup>116</sup> In 2025, AT&T announced the launch of FirstNet Fusion—an open communications platform that connects users across disparate radio systems and cellular networks. AT&T plans to integrate FirstNet Fusion with certain NG911 system platforms.<sup>117</sup>

Some public safety stakeholders envision that both networks will provide coverage nationwide.<sup>118</sup> Although the FirstNet Network has been implemented across most areas of the nation, progress on NG911 implementation is not as far along.<sup>119</sup> One of the key impediments to the nationwide transition to NG911 is funding.<sup>120</sup> Congress has previously provided some federal funding for two 911 grant programs:

- The Ensuring Needed Help Arrives Near Callers Employing 911 Act of 2004 (ENHANCE 911 Act of 2004; P.L. 108-494, Title I) authorized funding for a grant program to be jointly administered by NHTSA and NTIA. The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (P.L. 109-171) authorized up to \$43.5 million from the proceeds of spectrum auctions conducted by the FCC to carry out the grant program.<sup>121</sup>
- The Next Generation 9-1-1 Advancement Act of 2012—Title VI, Subtitle E, of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-96)—authorized the use of spectrum auction proceeds for a 911 grant program, jointly administered by NHTSA and NTIA. Congress directed \$115 million from the proceeds of certain spectrum auctions to carry out the grant program.<sup>122</sup>

There is no funding authorized for 911 grants at this time.

---

<sup>114</sup> The group concluded its work in May 2023. See 911.gov, “NG911/ERBN Interconnection,” October 19, 2023, <https://www.911.gov/projects/ng911-erbn-interconnection/>.

<sup>115</sup> An emergency services Internet Protocol network (ESInet) is a component of NG911 architecture that routes emergency calls and data to the PSAP nearest the emergency and provides a connection to other PSAPs to promote the seamless transfer of calls and data. See AT&T, “AT&T to Enhance Emergency Response with Advanced Features for Next Generation 9-1-1,” June 23, 2025, <https://about.att.com/story/2025/att-esinet.html>.

<sup>116</sup> If a disruption is detected on the AT&T ESInet, any calls made to 911 are automatically rerouted over the FirstNet Network. See Jim Bugel and Curtis S. Sutton, “Tennessee Becomes First in the Nation to Integrate FirstNet with AT&T ESInet for All 9-1-1 Call Centers Statewide,” Tennessee Department of Commerce and Insurance, February 16, 2023, <https://www.tn.gov/commerce/blog/2023/2/16/tn-becomes-1st-in-nation-to-integrate-firstnet-with-att-esinet-for-all-911-call-centers.html>.

<sup>117</sup> AT&T, “Introducing FirstNet Fusion: New Mission-Critical Platform Will Revolutionize First Responder Communications,” October 16, 2025, <https://about.att.com/story/2025/firstnet-fusion.html>.

<sup>118</sup> 911.gov, “NG911 & FirstNet Guide for State & Local Authorities,” February 19, 2025, <https://www.911.gov/projects/ng911-for-public-safety-leaders/ng911-and-firstnet-guide-for-state-and-local-authorities/>.

<sup>119</sup> Jackie Mines, “How Is NG911 Progressing?,” *Urgent Communications*, February 11, 2025, <https://urgentcomm.com/911/how-is-ng911-progressing->.

<sup>120</sup> See letter from Mel Maier, et al., to Senate Commerce Committee Members, June 4, 2025, <https://www.apointl.org/~documents/docs/joint-911-funding-2025-senate?layout=file#:~:text=Regrettably%2C%20despite%20the%20widespread%20adoption,Minority%20Leader%20Schumer.>

<sup>121</sup> Funding could be used for “hardware, software, training, and/or consulting services directly relating to the upgrade of ... 911 equipment and operations.” See 911.gov, *Enhanced 911 (E911) Grant Program Final Report*, March 2013, p. 1, [https://www.911.gov/assets/National\\_911\\_Program\\_E911\\_Grant\\_Program\\_Report\\_2013.pdf](https://www.911.gov/assets/National_911_Program_E911_Grant_Program_Report_2013.pdf).

<sup>122</sup> Funding could be used for the implementation and operation of 911 services, including adoption and operation of NG911 services and applications. See NTIA, *911 Grant Program Notice of Funding Opportunity 2018*, August 24, 2018, <https://www.ntia.gov/other-publication/911-grant-program-notice-funding-opportunity-2018>.

Congress may consider whether the federal government should once again provide funding for NG911. In the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress, activities related to the implementation and coordination of NG911 have been proposed in the Next Generation 9-1-1 Act (H.R. 6505/S. 4062). Additionally, the Supporting U.S. Critical Connectivity and Economic Strategy and Security for BEAD Act (SUCCESS for BEAD Act; S. 3565/H.R. 6920) would allow for the planning, implementation, or maintenance of NG911 as an eligible use of non-deployment funds in the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program.<sup>123</sup> If Congress chooses to provide more funding for the transition to NG911, it could consider—through existing or new legislation—requiring a portion of the funds be used to facilitate integration with the FirstNet Network (e.g., funds could be used to purchase the necessary equipment). Congress could also consider requiring coordination between the FirstNet Authority and the federal agencies supporting the administration of NG911 grants (e.g., NHTSA, NTIA) to provide technical guidance or training to the grantees for integration purposes. Congress could choose to provide no federal funding for NG911 and/or not to act on the integration of the FirstNet Network and NG911, leaving it as a potential private-sector responsibility, which could be cost prohibitive in some instances. One observer has warned that if Congress chooses not to provide additional funding to localities to upgrade 911 systems to NG911, it could hinder integration with the FirstNet Network, “as much of the communications technology currently in use will have to be changed out on the dispatching side of emergency communications” in order to integrate with FirstNet.<sup>124</sup>

## Author Information

Colby Leigh Pechtoll  
Specialist in Telecommunications Policy

Amanda H. Peskin  
Analyst in Telecommunications Policy

---

## Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS’s institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.

---

<sup>123</sup> For more information on the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program, see CRS Video WVB00835, *Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment*, by Colby Leigh Pechtoll.

<sup>124</sup> Jon Polly, “Following the Footpath to Next Generation 911 Communications,” *Jade Learning*, January 5, 2022, <https://www.jadelearning.com/blog/following-the-footpath-to-next-generation-911-communications/>.