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The National Congress of American Indians Resolution #SEA-25-033

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Title: Calling on Congress to reauthorize the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) before its 2027 terminations to support tribal public safety and emergency operations

WHEREAS, we, the members of the National Congress of American Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution; and

WHEREAS, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments; and

WHEREAS, the ability of any nation to enact, enforce and interpret its own laws and be governed by them is one of the most recognized powers of any sovereign. To ensure the Tribal Nations can safeguard against any criminal activity, natural disasters, and national security threats, it is imperative that Tribal Nations have both the jurisdiction and the resources needed to keep tribal communities safe and secure for everyone; and

WHEREAS, NCAI advocates to strengthen Tribal law enforcement, improve coordination between federal agencies working for and within Indian Country, and urge the Department of Justice (DOJ), Department of Interior (DOI), and all other federal agencies to live up to their trust and treaty responsibilities to Tribal Nations; and



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WHEREAS, NCAI is committed to improving public safety within Tribal Nations, increasing access to justice for Native peoples, and protecting the health and well-being of tribal citizens; and

WHEREAS, in response to the communication challenges that hindered public safety's response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the 9/11 Commission's recommendation to address the longstanding communications issues facing public safety, the U.S. Congress, in 2012, created the federal First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority), set aside Band 14 spectrum, and provided up to \$7 billion in spectrum auction proceeds to provide a dedicated network for our country's first responders; and

WHEREAS, the NCAI plays an important role in the FirstNet Authority's governance structure with NCAI representation on the statutorily created Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) and NCAI involvement in the FirstNet Authority Tribal Advisory Group (TAG), which advises the PSAC and FirstNet Authority Board of Directors on the needs of public safety serving Tribal Nations; and

WHEREAS, the FirstNet Authority has a Tribal consultation policy to govern government-to-government consultation between federally recognized Tribal Nations and the federal FirstNet Authority; and

WHEREAS, the FirstNet Authority has a mission to develop a nationwide wireless broadband network with rural coverage requirements to ensure the network effectively serves first responders across the country, including those serving tribal communities; and

WHEREAS, Tribal lands have disproportionately been underserved by broadband investment, and limited grant funding and other resource constraints have made it difficult for many Tribal Nations to fully equip their public safety and emergency personnel with the necessary technology and communication capabilities; and

WHEREAS, the FirstNet Authority required its private sector partner, AT&T, to meet rural buildout requirements, with the initial phase of FirstNet network buildout making progress to expand FirstNet coverage in tribal communities, resulting in a 65 percent increase in FirstNet wireless coverage on tribal lands between 2018 – 2023 and more than 565 new FirstNet cell towers serving Tribal Nations; and

WHEREAS, the FirstNet public-private partnership provides public safety users with a dedicated fleet of FirstNet portable cell towers for use during planned events and emergency incidents, including, but not limited to, support for tribal public safety during a search and rescue on the Yankton Sioux Nation, COVID-19 responses at the Navajo Nation and Confederated Tribes of the Colville Nation, and planned events at the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, the Cow Creek, Umpqua Nation; and



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WHEREAS, the FirstNet Authority has invested in research and development on technology solutions, which has lowered access barriers for public safety and equipped first responders with new technology to facilitate cross-agency communication and heightened situational awareness; and

WHEREAS, while significant progress has been made to expand FirstNet wireless coverage on tribal lands, future investment by the FirstNet Authority should continue, so the network can be expanded to Tribal Nations that remain unserved and underserved; and

WHEREAS, the FirstNet Authority announced plans in February 2024 for additional investments in wireless coverage, including more than \$2 billion for wireless coverage over the next ten years with a focus on U.S. borders and in tribal, territorial, and rural communities that have disproportionately been unserved and underserved by commercial cellular carriers; and

WHEREAS, public safety and emergency response personnel serving Tribal Nations perform a critical function protecting and serving tribal citizens and those living, working and visiting tribal lands, and these brave men and women should have access to the necessary communications tools and reliable, secure, and dedicated connectivity to support their important missions.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that NCAI urges prompt action by the U.S. Congress to strike the statutory sunset language in P.L. 112-96; and

BE IT RESOLVED, NCAI supports reauthorization of the FirstNet Authority to continue critical investments in FirstNet wireless broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas, including on Tribal lands, and

BE IT RESOLVED, to maintain the representation by NCAI and other regional and public safety Tribal organizations within the FirstNet program governance structure to ensure the needs of Tribal first responders to inform the future operation and evolution of the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network.

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be the policy of NCAI until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution.



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CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the General Assembly at the 2025 Annual Convention of the National Congress of American Indians, held November 16 to 21, 2025 at the Seattle Convention Center in Seattle, Washington, with a quorum present.


Mark Macarro, President

ATTEST:


Christie Modlin, Recording Secretary