WASHINGTON FIRE CHIEFS

Washington Fire Chiefs Association

November 2, 2026

The Honorable Ted Cruz
Chair, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Deb Fischer
Chair, Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Media
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ben Ray Luján
Ranking Member, Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Media
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Support for Reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority and Senate Commerce Improvements to the House-Passed Bill

Dear Chair Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, Chair Fischer, and Ranking Member Luján:

The Washington Fire Chiefs Association (WFC) represents the interests of Washington Fire Chiefs from agencies across the State of Washington. Our efforts are committed to advancing the protection of life, property, and the environment through leadership, education, and advocacy. On behalf of our members, I write to express our strong support for the reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority).

As leaders of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation and its Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Media, you play a central role in ensuring the continuity and advancement of the nation's only dedicated public safety broadband network. The FirstNet Authority was established by Congress in 2012 following communication challenges identified during major national emergencies, including the September 11, 2001, attacks. Congress created the FirstNet Authority within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration to provide first responders with a secure, interoperable, and resilient communications network designed specifically for public safety operations.

Since its inception, the FirstNet Authority has successfully met its congressional mandate. The Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN) was completed on schedule and within budget, providing reliable, prioritized, and preemptive broadband communications to more than 30,000 public safety agencies across over three million square miles of coverage.

It operates under a fiscally responsible, self-sustaining funding model, requiring no ongoing appropriations from Congress. It has been called the single most successful public-private partnership in the history of the United States.The operational oversight and structure of the FirstNet Authority Board, which includes both public safety and industry leaders, ensures accountability, transparency, and continued innovation. The Authority's success has resulted in a trusted ecosystem of public safety applications, devices, and solutions that enhance situational awareness and coordination during complex incidents.

Reauthorization of the FirstNet Authority before the 2027 deadline is essential to maintaining the operational integrity and modernization of this network. The United States Government Accountability Office has emphasized that failure to reauthorize the Authority would jeopardize the sustainability of the network and undermine the confidence of the first responder community.

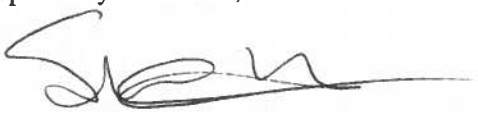
As the Senate Commerce Committee considers improvements and enhancements to the House-passed FirstNet reauthorization bill, the public safety community supports the revised bill language as an important step forward. The revised language restores and preserves the FirstNet Authority's Board-centered operational control, strengthens public safety representation on the Board, requires timely action to fill Board vacancies, and maintains an Executive Director who reports to the Board. Just as important, the revised language creates a 60-day deemed-executed process for Board-approved network reinvestment decisions and task orders, helping ensure that operational improvements are not delayed by unnecessary bureaucracy. These changes retain the 10-year reauthorization framework and added oversight, transparency, and accountability provisions in the House bill while better protecting the public safety governance model Congress established for America's first responders.

The public safety community across the United States represented by the Washington Fire Chiefs Association has witnessed firsthand the operational value of reliable broadband communication and recognizes the value of FirstNet going forward during tornados, floods, wildland fires, acts of violence and other large-scale incidents. The ability to maintain dependable, prioritized communications across jurisdictions and disciplines has strengthened interoperability, and in the future, will continue to strengthen emergency response capabilities and ultimately continue to save lives.

FirstNet will continue to be critically important across the United States when fire, EMS, law enforcement, emergency management, and 9-1-1 use FirstNet for coordination, command, situational awareness, mutual aid, and continuity of communications. It also will continue to support future incidents such as those that have occurred across many states and jurisdictions, where dependable priority and preemption are essential to public safety resources so as to remain connected across agencies, jurisdictions, and operational assignments. These examples demonstrate why continued modernization, Board oversight, and public safety-driven decision-making are essential to the future of the network.

In support of a unified public safety effort, the WFC respectfully urges the Committee and Subcommittee to take prompt action to reauthorize the First Responder Network Authority with the revised Senate Commerce language. Doing so will reaffirm Congress's commitment to public safety and ensure that America's first responders continue to have the reliable and interoperable communications network they need to protect the communities they serve.

Respectfully submitted,



Steve Heitman, Fire Chief
Renton Regional Fire Authority
President, Washington Fire Chiefs (WFC)