NATIONAL FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE

FirstNet Reauthorization: Officer Safety Must Come First

The reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) before its statutory authority expires in February 2027 is a priority for the National Fraternal Order of Police.

Created in 2012 within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), FirstNet has transformed emergency communications across the country by guaranteeing preferential treatment and override capabilities in crises, ensuring that law enforcement officers and other emergency responders can communicate even in the most dire of circumstances. Our members, who serve on the front lines in communities throughout the nation, depend on FirstNet's reliable framework to perform their duties safely and effectively.

The House passed H.R. 7386, the "First Responder Network Authority Reauthorization Act," which would extend its reauthorization through September 2037 but introduces burdensome governance provisions that will hinder FirstNet's primary objectives and jeopardize emergency operations, community protection, as well as officer and public safety. These provisions are unacceptable. The intent of Congress in establishing FirstNet was to create an authority with public safety expertise at its core—it was deliberately designed to prevent mission drift and ensure the network remains focused on law enforcement and emergency responder operational requirements. The provisions in the House-passed bill jeopardize what has been the key to FirstNet's success—regular engagement with public safety users to ensure that operational realities inform network management and investment decisions.

The FOP worked with other public safety stakeholders to develop draft legislative text, which has been shared with the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation as an alternative to the House-passed bill. Our proposed draft holds true to the original purpose of FirstNet—protecting officer and public safety. The draft bill makes public safety interests the prime focus when it comes to regulation, decision-making, and vendor interaction. The FirstNet Authority Board should make the decisions about the nationwide public safety broadband network as well as the governance and operation of the FirstNet Authority. It is at variance with common sense to shift decision-making authority away from public safety professionals and put it in the hands of bureaucrats, which could revive old weaknesses, marginalize frontline input, and delay vital choices.

The FOP's priority is to reauthorize a highly effective nationwide public safety broadband network with an incredible track record of success that has the full confidence of the public safety community. The alternative text we have provided does not differ materially from the House bill, except that it does not compromise its operational integrity by introducing unnecessary bureaucracy and correctly puts officer and public safety above all other considerations.