

Opening Statement of Chairman Brett Guthrie
Subcommittee on Communications and Technology
“Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization.”
Wednesday, February 4, 2026, at 10:15 AM

Thank you, Chairman Hudson, for bringing us together for this important hearing and thank you to the witnesses for your participation. I look forward to hearing more about the First Responder Network Authority and the impact that the legislation before us will have.

It has been almost 15 years since Congress created the First Responder Network Authority. Born in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, this network is critical for first responders to have a communications network that works when they most need it.

It is important that this Committee evaluates the progress FirstNet has made since its inception and make necessary changes to improve it. The Committee’s oversight work on this issue has indicated ongoing challenges with the FirstNet structure, and the Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General has indicated problems with transparency and accountability.

The legislation before us makes those reforms to improve transparency, accountability, and leadership, but also to ensure the longevity and continued development—and success—of this network as technology evolves. This bill keeps important aspects of FirstNet, such as the Board which provides valuable expertise to this network to ensure continued success of the program.

Last year, I had the opportunity to meet with the Fern Creek Fire Chief and other local first responders in my district to talk about FirstNet operations and disaster preparedness. We talked about reliable access to communications for our first responders and our communities, especially during emergencies like the devastating tornadoes and floods that struck the Commonwealth in recent years.

The creation of the First Responder Network Authority led the way in innovation for a dedicated communication service for first responders, where today there are now competing services for first responder communications. This healthy competition will drive further market innovation to provide the best services dedicated to public safety.

However, we must ensure that different users of these services can communicate and are interoperable with each other. Regardless of which service provider first responders use, it is critical that their communications tools work reliably in the moments of greatest need.

Thank you again to the witnesses for your participation and I look forward to hearing from you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.