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September 9, 2025

The Honorable Brett Guthrie
Chair, Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Richard Hudson
Chair, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology

The Honorable Doris Matsui
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology

Dear Representatives Guthrie, Pallone, Hudson, and Matsui:

On behalf of the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International,¹ I thank you for your ongoing leadership in advancing public safety communications. As the first responders on the frontlines who answer 9-1-1 calls and coordinate emergency response, APCO's members know firsthand that reliable, interoperable, and secure communications are essential to the protection of life and property. Today's hearing provides an important opportunity to strengthen emergency communications nationwide, including by underscoring the importance of Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) and FirstNet as essential components of a modern, resilient public safety communications ecosystem.

Federal investment is critical to fully deploy NG9-1-1 and provide emergency communications centers (ECCs) with the tools they need to perform their lifesaving work. NG9-1-1 represents a transformative upgrade to our nation's public safety communications infrastructure. By enabling the receipt and exchange of text, data, photos, and video, NG9-1-1 provides ECCs with real-time, actionable

¹ Founded in 1935, APCO is the world's oldest and largest organization of public safety communications professionals. APCO is a non-profit association with over 40,000 members, primarily consisting of state and local government employees who manage and operate public safety communications systems – including 9-1-1 emergency communications centers, emergency operations centers, radio networks, and information technology – for law enforcement, fire, emergency medical, and other public safety agencies.

information. These capabilities will improve situational awareness, enhance decision-making, and allow 9-1-1 professionals to coordinate resources more effectively during emergencies. NG9-1-1 will also strengthen interoperability between local, state, and national public safety systems, ensuring that no community is left behind and that information flows seamlessly across jurisdictions.

Congress can ensure nationwide NG9-1-1 deployment by enacting legislation to establish a federal grant program supporting the transition. The public safety community supports legislative language unanimously passed by the Committee last year as part of the Spectrum Auction Reauthorization Act (H.R. 3565). NG9-1-1 deployment remains a national security and public safety priority, and we call on Congress to take swift action to address this need.

Critical to the success of NG9-1-1 and public safety communications is a dedicated broadband network that ensures first responders can reliably communicate during emergencies. Today, millions of first responders throughout the nation rely on FirstNet, the nation's single nationwide public safety broadband network designed by and for public safety professionals, to carry out their lifesaving missions. This is why we urge Congress to permanently reauthorize the FirstNet Authority before its sunset. FirstNet provides secure, reliable, high-speed connectivity in the field, enabling first responders to receive critical information from ECCs, share real-time situational updates, and coordinate response efforts during both routine and large-scale incidents. Its priority and preemption features ensure that first responders maintain uninterrupted access to communications even during natural disasters and other emergencies that generate heavy network traffic. The independent FirstNet Authority Board, guided by input from public safety leaders, has been critical in ensuring FirstNet remains accountable in delivering reliable support to public safety. The first responders who rely on FirstNet during emergencies deserve certainty and uninterrupted access to this high-speed broadband network.

In addition, we commend the Federal Communications Commission for its unanimous, bipartisan decision last year to create a Band Manager framework for the 4.9 GHz Band, assign an overlay license to the Band Manager, and permit the Band Manager to enter into a sharing agreement with FirstNet, while protecting incumbent 4.9 GHz licensees. Allowing FirstNet to use the 4.9 GHz Band would give first responders who rely upon the nationwide public safety broadband network to access this critical mid-band spectrum for advanced technologies such as 5G, which will put new life-saving communications tools in the hands of first responders.

Federal support for modernizing public safety communications capabilities and ensuring access to FirstNet as a single, unified dedicated broadband network is essential to maintaining resilient, interoperable, and secure communications for all communities. By investing in NG9-1-1 and FirstNet, Congress will empower all first responders to carry out their missions more effectively and enhance public safety for all Americans.

Finally, as we work to upgrade the technologies relied upon by the public safety community, we must also recognize the critical importance of the people behind these lifesaving systems. Public safety telecommunicators – who answer 9-1-1 calls and coordinate emergency responses – are currently misclassified in the Office of Management and Budget's Standard Occupational Classification system as administrative professionals, rather than the more accurate "protective service occupation." Congress should pass legislation (the 9-1-1 SAVES Act, H.R. 637, in the House and the Enhancing First Response Act, S. 725, in the Senate) to federally reclassify these individuals, appropriately acknowledging their

skill, responsibility, and essential role in protecting our communities.

We thank you for your attention to these essential public safety matters and stand ready to partner with you in moving these important initiatives forward.

Sincerely,

Capt. Jack Varnado
9-1-1 Director
Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office

President
APCO International