



COMMITTEE ON
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DEMOCRATS
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Pallone Remarks at Public Safety Communications Hearing

Washington, D.C. – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Communications and Technology hearing on “Solutions to Strengthen U.S. Public Safety Communications:”*

Today, we’re here to talk about ways to support public safety and our nation’s first responders. America asks so much of our emergency workers, the least we can do is make sure they have the best and most up-to-date tools to do their jobs.

I’d like to thank our panel for the work they do every day helping Americans in times of crisis and distress.

It seems almost every week we are reminded of the critical role first responders play in keeping people safe. Last week, we watched as first responders along the Carolina coast rescued people trapped in their homes as rising waters made it nearly impossible to escape.

Emergency communications is critical. If 911 calls are not completed, emergency responders will not arrive. That’s why it’s so important that Congress enacted my SANDy Act earlier this year to help ensure our critical communications networks have access to the resources they need to stay online during a disaster.

Beyond calls from the public to 911 dispatchers, if police or firefighters cannot communicate with each other during a crisis, their lives and the lives of the public are put at risk.

This Committee, on a bipartisan basis, passed legislation to create a nationwide, broadband communications network dedicated to public safety. What resulted is FirstNet. While early in its roll-out, the network promises to make first responders across the country safer and help them with their work.

FirstNet is an important step, but more must be done to help public safety. Today’s hearing considers some important issues. I have long criticized states, including New Jersey, of

diverting 911 fees. As Mr. Currey will explain, it is expensive to operate a 911 center, and it is important that they are fully funded.

States should also be upgrading centers to be next generation 911 capable. Next generation 911 will enable the public to transmit images, video, and text to 911 centers where operators will be able to process and pass this information to first responders.

This is extremely valuable information, but the costs will be significant. Last year, every Democrat on the Committee cosponsored the LIFT America Act, which makes key investments in our nation's infrastructure, including helping to fund the deployment of next generation 911. In addition, Representatives Eshoo, Torres, and I introduced the Next Generation 911 Act of 2017, which expands the federal NG-911 grant program.

These are commonsense proposals that we should be able to work on together. In the coming year, I urge my colleagues to work with me on legislation to upgrade our nation's infrastructure, including our public safety systems.

I also would like to recognize the important efforts of Mr. Engel to fight swatting – fake emergency calls to dispatch police to an address where no emergency is occurring. This is dangerous. It puts innocent lives at risk and burdens already stretched police resources. Congress must provide law enforcement the tools to stop such malicious acts.

Thank you, I yield back.

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