



Position Statement

Support for the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet)

The Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-96) provided 20 MHz of spectrum in the 700 MHz band and \$7 billion to build a nationwide broadband network dedicated to the mission requirements of public safety. This legislation also created FirstNet, an independent authority within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. FirstNet is in the process of developing and will operate the new broadband network, which is to be based on a single nationwide network architecture, thus enabling first responders to communicate with one another within and across jurisdictions.

The IAFC believes that FirstNet, by providing dedicated, interoperable, mission-critical data communications, will enhance emergency response operations throughout the fire and emergency service for years to come. FirstNet will be a vital component for an effective response to a terrorist incident, a natural disaster, and for everyday response. The Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (9/11 Commission Report) identified the need for improved interoperable communications between first responders and recommended dedicated spectrum for public safety. These needs were again amplified and identified in the after-action reports of Hurricane Katrina and other incidents.

The major nationwide LTE carriers have been unable or unwilling to provide fire-rescue services and other first responders with an ability to pre-empt civilian users to allow for unfettered network access for mission critical purposes. As a result, there is presently no interoperable mission critical communications network available for fire-rescue personnel to share data among their cohorts or other public safety first responders. Accordingly, the use of mission critical data in the field of emergency services is limited and nearly non-existent. A nation-wide interoperable data communications system is a vital component for an effective response to terrorist incidents, natural disasters and everyday response.

The FirstNet network will allow multiple agencies to be interoperable on-scene at an incident. It will also be more resilient than commercial networks and prevent the network from being jammed by users during an emergency. FirstNet has met every milestone to date, and we are encouraged by the continued urgency of FirstNet leadership to provide these much needed services to first responders and fire chiefs nationwide.

The IAFC represents fire chiefs who have responded to numerous large-scale events including natural disasters and acts of terrorism, we know firsthand the benefits that the FirstNet network stands to offer in terms of improving communications, coordination and situational awareness during emergency response operations. FirstNet devices and applications will ultimately change the way local fire and EMS departments operate.

Therefore, the IAFC encourages fire chiefs throughout the nation to participate in FirstNet's consultation process with all 56 states and territories. This will ensure that our members' priorities, most importantly the expeditious delivery of FirstNet services in every state, are a critical factor in every governor's decision.

The ability of a single communication network to dispatch EMS and fire personnel, a medical helicopter and other emergency responders from different jurisdictions all at the same time while enabling video, text and data communications at broadband speeds will save critical minutes when it matters most.

It is for these reasons that the IAFC Board of Directors unanimously voted to fully support FirstNet and its mission.

Submitted: 31 August 2016

Adopted by IAFC Board of Directors: 8 September 2016