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NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION
FIRST RESPONDER NETWORK AUTHORITY
COMBINED BOARD AND COMMITTEES MEETING TRANSCRIPT
March 12, 2025

Acting Board Chair, Renee Gordon: Good morning. I am Renee Gordon and today I am convening the First Responder Network Authority's Combined Board and Committees Meeting as Acting Board Chair.

Welcome to my Board colleagues and the FirstNet Authority team and thank you to everyone who is joining us today. The Board is pleased to be meeting in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. I would also like to welcome our new Board designee from the Office of Management and Budget, Mark Calabria. Let's review the agenda for today's meeting.

We will start with a Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) update from PSAC Chair, Chris Lombard, and hear updates from the Board's Advocacy, Finance & Investment, and Programs & Future Planning Committees. I would like to ask our Board Secretary to call the roll for the Board and confirm that each committee has a quorum. Madam Secretary, please call the roll and then read the Conflicts of Interest Statement.

Jennifer Watts: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will mark you as present. Michael Adkinson?

Michael Adkinson: Present.

Jennifer Watts: Billy Bob Brown, Jr.?

Billy Bob Brown Jr.: Present virtually.

Jennifer Watts: Damon Darsey?

Damon Darsey: Present.

Jennifer Watts: Alexandra Fernández Navarro?

Alexandra Fernández Navarro: Present.

Jennifer Watts: Erik Gaull?

Jennifer Watts: Sean McDevitt?

Sean McDevitt: Present.

Jennifer Watts: Warren Mickens?

Warren Mickens: Present.

Jennifer Watts: Jocelyn Moore?

Jocelyn Moore: Present.

Jennifer Watts: Jeffrey Norman?

Jeffrey Norman: Present.

Jennifer Watts: Rasheid Scarlett?

Rasheid Scarlett: Present.

Jennifer Watts: Trisha Wolford?

Trisha Wolford: Present.

Jennifer Watts: Mark Calabria?

Jennifer Watts: Madam Chair, we do have a quorum for the Board as well as for all four committees. Now I will read the conflicts statement. Prior to participating in the FirstNet Authority Combined Board and Committees Meeting today, the Board members have reviewed the agenda as well as the conflict of interest guidance provided by the Ethics Law and Program Division of the Department of Commerce, Office of General Counsel regarding the conflict of interest standards that apply to the Board members. All Board members have responded prior to today's meeting that they do not have a conflict and will not need to recuse themselves from participation in any portion of this meeting. Thank you.

Renee Gordon: Thank you, Secretary. Each member of the Board has before him or her the minutes of the December meeting of the Board. Are there any additions or corrections to the minutes? Hearing none, I will take a motion that we accept these minutes.

Warren Mickens: It's Warren Mickens, I move that we accept these minutes.

Renee Gordon: Is there a second?

Alexandra Fernández Navarro: Board member Fernández Navarro. I second the motion.

Renee Gordon: All in favor, please say aye.

All: Aye.

Renee Gordon: Opposed, indicate by saying nay. Are there any abstentions? The December meeting minutes are accepted. Madam Secretary, please make the minutes available to the public following this meeting. Now we have an update from the Public Safety Advisory Committee Chair, Chief Chris Lombard.

Chris Lombard: Thank you very much, Chair Gordon. It's been a pleasure to see everybody again since our last meeting about four months ago. Wonderful weather here in Oklahoma City and getting to spend some time meeting some of the new Board members. Next slide please.

I wanted to recap our last meeting in December in Boulder. We had about 14 PSAC members there in person and were able to hold the meeting in conjunction with the Board meeting. I enjoyed the opportunity to meet and engage with new Board members. Thank you all for being part of our meeting. We had good feedback from the Board and lots of interest in the work being done across the associations. We heard about the FirstNet Authority's methodology for identifying areas of interest related to coverage enhancement investments and learned from the FirstNet Authority about the plan to take coverage enhancement workshops into the states. PSAC members shared input and key considerations from members on topics such as topography and signal propagation, satellite to device connections, and cyber security. We also discussed how FirstNet is a model for other nations working in public safety broadband networks. On our second day, we visited the FirstNet technical headquarters and lab. We learned about the work that our friends at the NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) Public Safety Communications Research Division are doing and participated in an AR/VR (Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality) session, tech demos, and QPP (Quality of Service, Priority, and Preemption) demo. We also saw the FirstNet deployables and learned about their capabilities. Because of that deployable demo, one of our PSAC members decided to pursue a CRD (Compact Rapid Deployable) best practices working group. This is a great example of how these in-person discussions can translate into follow-on activities among our association representatives. Next slide please.

Public Safety Advisory Committee and Tribal Advisory Group (TAG) look ahead. As we scope out the year ahead, we're preparing for appointment and reappointment process for PSAC members. We'll continue to collaborate with the FirstNet Authority on investment discussions related to coverage enhancement and network evolution. For example, push to talk and location-based services. PSAC members support advocacy and support FirstNet's mission and will continue to collaborate with the FirstNet Authority Board. The PSAC plans to meet in Seattle/Bellevue in June 2025, pending authorization of the meeting. Tribal Advocacy Group briefing materials are geared towards engaging tribal councils and FirstNet Authority and FirstNet network. If there are no questions, that concludes my updated and I'll turn the floor back to you Chair Gordon. Thank you.

Renee Gordon: Thank you Chief. We will have an update now from Advocacy Committee Chair, Chief Wolford.

Trisha Wolford: Thank you, Chair Gordon. I would like to share some engagement highlights from the first quarter of our fiscal year 2025. I will also cover some recent collaborations with our public safety stakeholders. Next slide please.

During the first quarter of fiscal year 2025, our team participated in nearly 300 engagements. We reached 13,000 stakeholders in 53 states, territories, and federal agencies. We hosted 13 public safety tours at our Boulder facility for 80 visitors, and this included state and local public safety and academia. Through these engagements, we gathered public safety feedback on their use of FirstNet and some known operational needs or capability gaps. We know that direct feedback from our end user is critical to our continued investment. The feedback we received aligns with the following high-level themes. Coverage. Coverage in all forms continues to be the most common public safety need. Reliability was also a common topic and through adoption and daily use of FirstNet solutions, stakeholders identified potential enhancements and outstanding needs. For example, challenges with adopting the push to talk. We will continue engagement with our most valuable asset, our public safety partners, so we can continue to listen and learn from them. We remain committed to ensuring public safety's unique communication needs are addressed by the FirstNet network.

I'd now like to give you some public safety engagements highlights. We'd like to highlight a few examples of FirstNet Authority engagement with public safety in the recent months. In January and February, there was attendance at several key discipline-specific conferences in Washington, D.C. This was concurrent with legislative winter conferences for the National Sheriff's Association, Major County Sheriffs of America, and Major Cities Chiefs Associations. Another engagement that was attended by the team, at which I also attended, was the 35th Annual Congressional Fire Services Institute Symposium. There were hundreds of members of the American Fire and EMS service, along with our International Fire Service partners. We continue to provide virtual and on-site planning and support to public safety for many planned events. This is all done as part of the network experience engagement program that PSA (FirstNet Authority Public Safety Advocacy) offers. Events since our December meeting include New Year's Eve celebrations, presidential inauguration, national security special events, the Super Bowl in New Orleans, and Groundhog Day in Pennsylvania. I would now like to invite council Board member, excuse me, Board member Moore, to speak on the Super Bowl, in her experience.

Jocelyn Moore: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's always meaningful to be with public safety during the Super Bowl and to witness FirstNet capabilities in action. But this year was especially poignant as the big game occurred in the shadow of the January 1st terrorist attack in New Orleans. This is also the first Super Bowl in history attended by a sitting U.S. President, President Trump. The public safety show of force in New Orleans during the Super Bowl, deterring any would be bad actors, was simply remarkable. And we had FirstNet public safety officials on hand who traveled from fighting wildfires in California to New Orleans with SAT Colts (Satellite Cell on Light Trucks) and CRDs newly outfitted with Starlink to help ensure the safety and security of tens of thousands of fans, me among them. The Super Bowl went on and millions of people in America and around the world were able to enjoy the big game because public safety was there. Because FirstNet was there. Thank you, Madam Chair. I yield the floor.

Trisha Welford: Thank you. I'd also like to continue with some emergency events and incidents that we supported our first responders. Things across the country such as wildfires, severe weather incidents, and of course, the tragic plane crash in the Washington, D.C., area. Part of this support comes in the form of mental wellness for our first responders who work at these events for days and days on end. We're grateful for the development of the health and wellness program, ROG (Response Operations Group) the dog, that supports our public safety members every day. We continue to coordinate regularly with AT&T to support events and understand network performance during all of these events. I am proud to say that the network performed as designed during the New Year's Day terrorist attack in New Orleans and in support of Los Angeles wildfires. FirstNet Authority and AT&T made staff available and AT&T staged FirstNet communication assets wherever needed.

The PSA team launched pilot coverage enhancement workshops in November. They successfully conducted five pilots between November and today, including one that occurred this week in Tennessee. They gathered specific feedback regarding state and local coverage needs and captured lessons learned to improve future workshop delivery and the underlying GIS (Geographic Information System) model.

If I can continue now, I'd like to talk about two prominent awards, the Chief Harlin R. McEwen Award and the Patriot Award nominations. Every year, we like to recognize figures from the public safety communications community. We are now soliciting nominations for the Chief Harlin R. McEwen, Public Safety Broadband Communications Award and the FirstNet Authority Patriot Awards. The McEwen Award honors an individual who has displayed remarkable leadership or made significant contributions to public safety broadband communications. The Patriot Award recognizes individuals or agencies that use FirstNet to make their communities safer. Recipients are considered from across all public safety disciplines. We invite you to visit [FirstNet.gov](https://www.firstnet.gov) to submit a nomination. Before I conclude my remarks, I would like to thank the outreach team who worked so hard and engages with and is always present for our first responder. This team does a tremendous job supporting, educating, and advocating. Thank you so much to the team for all of their hard work. Madam Chair, this concludes my Advocacy Committee update.

Renee Gordon: Thank you. That's quite a bit, Chief Welford. So now we'll receive an update from the Finance and Investment Committee.

Sean McDevitt: Thank you, Chair Gordon. It's an honor to be here in Oklahoma City, where over the past couple days the Board has had the opportunity to experience firsthand the Oklahoma standard, to listen and learn from many of our tribal nations, and to visit and tour the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum with a number of the first responders who were on the job that day nearly 30 years ago. So thank you very much to Oklahoma City for the hospitality.

During the initial five months of 2025 fiscal year, the Authority has obligated a cumulative total of \$36.5 million. We are well within the forecast parameters of our fiscal year 2025 budget. A quick comment on this – we're approximately 20% under budget expectations. This is largely

due to timing, both in terms of open positions and some delayed expenditures and continued prudence on behalf of the management team of the FirstNet Authority and the Board's oversight.

It's important to note that the FirstNet Authority is unlike and unique other government agencies. The FirstNet Authority does not operate through an annual congressional appropriations process. Our founding legislation required that we need to be financially self-sustaining and that's how we've operated throughout the tenure of the 25-year contract with AT&T. Annual taxpayer dollars are not spent on the annual operations budget.

I'd like to then shift and speak about our continued network investment, especially with respect to coverage. We continue to move forward on our network coverage expansion and enhancements to deliver results for public safety and the network that serves them. Importantly, we view coverage investments and the ability to enhance the network's footprint from a sum of parts approach. Acknowledging that no single coverage solution can possibly address the unique coverage needs of all public safety stakeholders across the 56 states and territories covered by the National Public Safety Broadband Network. We have been addressing public safety's need for enhanced coverage through a number of ongoing and pending investments. These include bringing on air 1,000 new Band 14 enabled sites, which AT&T is deploying, the majority of which are already providing new coverage to first responders today - providing in building coverage options where first responders lack wireless communications coverage. Upgrading the deployables fleet with Starlink's Low Earth Orbit (LEO) capability, which will provide enhanced experience for public safety when supporting mission needs during hurricanes, wildfires, fires, and other disasters, including, as fellow Board member Moore outlined during the most recent Super Bowl. We are also ensuring that our cover includes 5G priority access for all 5G public safety users across all bands that AT&T operates. Our investment goal is to enhance our public safety stakeholder customer experience wherever and whenever they rely on our Nations' only dedicated public safety wireless broadband network. Madam Chair, this concludes the Finance and Committee update. I yield the floor.

Renee Gordon: Thank you, Sean. We will now receive an update from Programs and Future Planning Committee Chair, Rasheid Scarlett.

Rasheid Scarlett: Thank you. So as you know, the FirstNet Authority, in partnership with AT&T, has built the largest public safety communications network in the world. Covering more than 2.9 million square miles. This network ensures that first responders in every state, territory, and Washington, D.C., can stay connected when it matters most. And while we're proud of how far we've come, we recognize there's still more work to do. FirstNet isn't just about scale, it's about making a difference for public safety communications. We created a growing marketplace that gives first responders access to custom-built services, mission ready devices, and innovative applications tailored specifically for their needs. So that's why I'd like to take a moment to reflect on a few items that have been already mentioned by our Board members and appreciate not just how far we've come, but what makes us truly different. What makes FirstNet unique and where we're headed next.

At the heart of FirstNet success are the unique capabilities that set it apart from any other network. First, let's talk about spectrum - the lifeblood of every network. FirstNet operates on

Band 14, our dedicated spectrum license exclusively for public safety on the FirstNet network, and allows for high-powered user equipment which more than doubles the coverage of cell sites in rural areas. This allows us to provide quality of service, priority access and preemption ensuring that first responders calls, texts, and data always go first, even in the most congested conditions. As Board member, Warren Mickens explains it, we can think of Band 14 as a private lane and a highway dedicated to public safety. Beyond spectrum, FirstNet provides on demand coverage solutions when and where responders need them. With our deployable fleets, agencies can request, at no cost to them, FirstNet mobile network assets, ensuring coverage in high demand situations or areas impacted by disaster. Another key component of the network is our dedicated core - one built solely for public safety communications, and security. This ensures greater security, reliability, and interoperability, a fundamental part of the vision that shaped FirstNet from the very beginning. All these features aren't just upgrades, they're part of FirstNet's DNA. They're rooted in public safety's vision for reliable, interoperable communications network. They're the foundations we continue to build on. But we're not stopping there.

Again, we're proud of the strides we've made, but we're not done yet. We keep asking ourselves, how can we do even more for public safety? How can we further strengthen FirstNet to meet the needs of today and tomorrow? With our current investment, we have a 10-year plan to do exactly that. To evolve, innovate, and expand. So here's what's happening right now. We're deploying our full 5G standalone core. This unlocks capabilities such as lower latency and improved reliability versus a non-standalone 5G. We're expanding coverage, not only focusing on urban areas, but also rural tribal lands and territories and areas along the border to ensure that no first responder is left without a reliable connection. We're also boosting in-building coverage deploying over 10,000 cell booster pros to ensure reliable service inside hospitals, schools, precincts, and other critical locations. Incorporating next generation technologies such as leveraging LEO satellites to ensure that first responders have the best tools at their disposal. And we're not just meeting our goals – we're exceeding them. We are ahead of schedule on 1,000 new Band 14 cell site deployments, bringing expanding coverage service to first responders even faster than planned. This isn't just about infrastructure; it's about ensuring that first responders have the tools they need to communicate effectively in every situation.

And this brings me to another point. FirstNet is not just about technology, it's about people. Our mission support is to support public safety 24/7 – 365 not just when disasters strike, but in their everyday operations. That's why we've deployed the Response Operation Group thousands of times, providing networks providing network for critical incidents. We've supported first responders, as Chair Moore mentioned, in planned events like the Super Bowl or presidential inauguration. And we're now in the early stages of enhancing our dedicated FirstNet Network Operations Center. Network operations and security center, which will enhance our monitoring and protection of the network 24/7 to safeguard it against cyber and impairment threats. Because at its core, FirstNet is more than coverage and capacity. It's about making sure first responders have what they need to do their job safely and effectively. And as we look ahead, our commitment remains strong.

So, what's next? FirstNet Authority is forward focused. Continuing to broaden our coverage across all 56 states and territories. That means that we're expanding at the street level, inside

buildings, ensuring that first responders have a reliable communication wherever they operate and we're refining the core network, making sure public safety has the best possible user experience, not just in times of crisis, but every day. FirstNet is more than just a network. It's a promise to those who protect us, a promise to innovate, to expand, and a promise to ensure that first responders have the tools they need, when and where they need them. And by embracing this forward focused mindset, we ensure that technology involved as technology evolves, FirstNet does too. Madam Chair, this concludes the Program and Future Planning Committee update.

Renee Gordon: Wow. Yeah. Thank you, Rasheid. As we close out today's meeting, I want to take a moment to reflect on the emergency events to date this year and the remarkable dedication and bravery shown by our Nation's first responders. Time and time again, they're called upon to be the best when things are at their worst. Unfortunately, we have already seen this many times this year. With the terrorist attacks in New Orleans and Las Vegas on New Year's Day, the devastating wildfires in California, numerous weather events across the country and the tragic plane crash in Washington, D.C.; our first responders and the emergency response systems they rely on were put to test. I am proud to say that when the first responders needed it most, FirstNet performed as it was designed for public safety. I speak this from personal experience.

The plane crash at National Airport happened in our backyard. My team worked nonstop taking calls from the public through the night and supporting first responders throughout the response and recovery efforts, which lasted several days. And Chief Wolford's team, her dive team, responded. Imagine what a dive team does. When I say FirstNet is built for public safety by public safety, I mean we are the only network that is. When I wear my public safety hat and we experience a crisis, it hits home why this network is so important, why first responders must be able to communicate, why we must continue to fight for their needs. Moments like these are why I take my role on this Board to heart. So we can make a difference for public safety personnel everywhere. It is vital that we continue to drive this network forward for public safety. Now I'm going to turn it over to Executive Director and CEO Joe Wassel for closing remarks.

Joe Wassel: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a few comments as we close out our meeting. I just want to thank you for recognizing the role of our Nation's first responders and the role that they played in over the last few months. These are powerful reminders about the need for this network and why the FirstNet Authority goes to work every single day to ensure the network is dependable for public safety. It must be reliable and it must be there for public safety for all types of emergencies and events. We continue to look how we can improve the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network to make it the best broadband network for public safety. And the FirstNet Authority is laser focused on listening to public safety and enhancing the network based on what they need. Our top priorities continue to be to consult with public safety leaders to understand their evolving needs and determine where they need coverage, which is exactly what we are doing in Oklahoma City, and what we were doing with the Tribal Nations earlier this week. And we will continue to do so with public safety in every state, in every territory, and the District of Columbia.

We will also continue to strategically invest in the future of this network so that it evolves with new technologies and capabilities: 5G, satellite, and other future technologies that we haven't

dreamed of yet. All of this starts and ends with our team at the FirstNet Authority. And I just want to say that I am personally grateful to the entire FirstNet Authority for what they do every single day. And I respect their work and I respect them as federal employees and as moms and dads and brothers and sisters as we come together to support public safety. I want to thank the Board too for your tireless efforts. Weekends, late nights, on the road, and everything that you do in your day job to support public safety and everything you do with the job that I know that is tied to your heart here at the Board. So thank you very much and hope everyone has a safe trip home.

Renee Gordon: Thank you, Joe. I also want to personally thank the team that came out here on such short notice and set this all up and have us rolling like nothing happened. So again, thank you guys. As we close out today's meeting, I want to thank the local, state, federal, and tribal public community representatives we met with here in Oklahoma City earlier this week to learn about the unique communications challenges and I also want to thank the Oklahoma City Fire Chief Richard Kelly for sharing his unique perspective with us. One of the responders on the scene of a tragic bomb of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma in 1995. We are now prepared to adjourn this meeting. May I have a motion to adjourn?

Jeffrey Norman: Board member Jeffrey Norman. I move to adjourn.

Renee Gordon: And is there a second?

Damon Darsey: Board member, Damon Darsey. I second that motion.

Renee Gordon: All in favor say aye.

All: Aye.

Renee Gordon: Opposed indicate by saying nay. Are there any abstentions? Thanks to all who have participated in the Combined Board and Committees Meetings and the audience who joined us today. This meeting is now adjourned.