



PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE
BUREAU OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION
SERVICES
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TO: Public Safety Agency Leaders in Pennsylvania
FROM: Major Diane Stackhouse, Pennsylvania State Police
DATE: March 14, 2018
SUBJECT: FirstNet and Public Safety Data Services

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "D. Stackhouse", located to the right of the "FROM:" line.

In late 2017, Governor Wolf signed an opt-in letter for the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) and its national vendor, AT&T, to provide public safety wireless data services here in the Commonwealth. By not opting out, it was decided to let AT&T build the radio access network (RAN) portion of the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN) in Pennsylvania. The PA-FirstNet team worked with AT&T to improve their plan to help make it a valuable option for public safety data communications across Pennsylvania.

I would like to clarify some misunderstandings about FirstNet and answer some of the questions we have heard from public safety officials like yourself. Please share this correspondence with your stakeholder groups and other public safety officials as you deem appropriate.

What Is the FirstNet State Plan and What Does This Have to Do With AT&T?

In 2016, FirstNet issued a request for proposal for a national vendor to implement the NPSBN. After a lengthy review, FirstNet selected AT&T as its partner. Their first joint activities were to put together plans for how the AT&T data services would be made available within each state and territory. The results were the various FirstNet State Plans. Over the next five years, the NPSBN will be constructed in response to specific requests for coverage, cost, and public safety features like priority and preemption over its other customers.

Does Opting-In Mean the Governor Has Endorsed These Services?

No. Opting-in is a procedural agreement which allows FirstNet and AT&T to build the RAN portion of the NPSBN in Pennsylvania, as opposed to building it ourselves. It was not an endorsement of the service, FirstNet, or AT&T. We hope the NPSBN will be successful; but, there are many aspects of the State Plan and AT&T's commitment to the Commonwealth that we will still need to see implemented before any recommendation could be made to adopt these services.

Is AT&T the Only Company That Will Be Providing These Services?

Yes and No. AT&T is the official partner of FirstNet, but there is no restriction on other carriers also providing similar services. This past summer, Verizon Wireless announced plans to also provide first responders with priority access on its network.. Other carriers may make similar announcements. There may be services, though, that only AT&T, as FirstNet's official partner, can provide. That has yet to be seen.

When Will These Services Be Available?

AT&T will immediately begin offering FirstNet services, which are essentially new cellular/LTE plans on their existing network. AT&T has announced that it has implemented priority access for public safety users and preemption in the event public safety needs more bandwidth to communicate during a crisis. Over time, AT&T will be adding dedicated public safety spectrum (Band 14) to their existing towers and constructing new sites for additional coverage. Verizon Wireless already offers priority service to its public safety customers.

Do I Need to Buy FirstNet Services?

No. The decision on what data service your agencies uses is up to you. AT&T and other vendors need to earn your service. You may pick the provider you think best serves your organization and your community. There is also no time pressure on your decision. If you are comfortable with your current services, you can keep them as long as you want or until you see a compelling reason to switch to another vendor.

Will the State Public Safety Agencies Buy FirstNet Plans?

Not necessarily. As with your agency, the decision on whether or not to switch to the FirstNet/AT&T plans will depend on the nature of the offered services, the coverage available, and the costs of data plans. It may be the case that some state agencies switch and others remain with their current carrier or carriers. The decision on whether an agency will switch services to the AT&T/FirstNet plans will be largely driven by whether AT&T can successfully demonstrate what it has promised in the FirstNet State Plan. This includes expanded coverage (indoors and outdoors), lower data plan costs, and responsiveness to public safety needs.

Who Do I Contact If I Have Questions?

Contact the PA-FirstNet team at info@pafirstnet.com if you have any questions about the FirstNet State Plan or the new data plans offered by AT&T and others.