

ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.
PENNSYLVANIA

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 2, 2018

Mr. Christopher Sambar
Senior Vice President
FirstNet Program
AT&T
Global Public Sector
1900 Gallows Road
Vienna, Virginia 22182

Dear Mr. Sambar:

In many rural areas of Pennsylvania, sparse populations and geographic challenges make it difficult to deploy telecommunications infrastructure. The remoteness of these communities already presents challenges for first responders addressing an emergency situation, and the lack of reliable telecommunications services magnifies these existing difficulties. In a public safety crisis, it is critical that these communities have access to reliable telecommunications services to ensure a timely response to hazardous incidents and to save lives. As you continue working with the Pennsylvania state government to deploy the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) emergency response telecommunications network in the Commonwealth, I urge you to prioritize coverage for the most rural and remote areas of the state.

Two emergency situations arising in Bedford County, Pennsylvania, over the last year highlight the acute need for dependable emergency response telecommunications capabilities. On August 2, 2017, thirty-two freight train cars carrying hazardous materials derailed in the town of Hyndman. A propane tank car caught fire, creating a significant safety risk for the town and forcing the nine hundred residents of Hyndman to evacuate for three days. Just months later, on December 29, Hyndman experienced another derailment as nine freight cars drove off the tracks a few miles south of the town. Fortunately, there were no injuries or deaths as a result of these incidents. But, as with every emergency situation, they have highlighted opportunities for improving the response to future incidents. Following the August derailment, county officials noted that the lack of cellular service hindered the evacuation of the town and made it difficult for response units to communicate with each other. To address these deficiencies, we must support significant investments in emergency telecommunications infrastructure in rural areas like Hyndman.

Congress initiated the creation of FirstNet in 2012 to pursue the long-standing goal of developing an interoperable communications network for first responders. Emergency situations require fast, reliable communications to ensure the safety of the public, first responders, property and the local environment. As the private-sector partner in the FirstNet buildout, AT&T plays a critical role in ensuring that the most rural areas, like Hyndman, are connected to the FirstNet network.

I commend AT&T for partnering with the federal and state governments in bringing advanced emergency response functionality to all areas of the country. As you continue collaborating with the Pennsylvania government on the siting and coverage of FirstNet infrastructure in the Commonwealth, I request that you prioritize coverage for the Hyndman and Bedford County areas, as well as other rural communities throughout the Commonwealth that lack dependable service. As the recent freight train derailments have demonstrated, there are unique challenges associated with responding to emergency situations in rural areas, and a critical first step towards addressing these challenges is the deployment of reliable emergency telecommunications networks.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bob Casey, Jr." in a cursive, stylized script.

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator