

NENA

The 9-1-1 Association

1700 Diagonal Road | Suite 500 | Alexandria, VA 22314

February 26, 2021

Dear Congressional Leaders:

As the only professional association dedicated to continuous improvement of our nation's 9-1-1 systems, NENA: The 9-1-1 Association looks forward to working with you in the 117th Congress to ensure all Americans are made safer through access to state-of-the-art 9-1-1 systems staffed by highly skilled 9-1-1 professionals.

NENA represents the leaders, supporters, and frontline responders of America's 9-1-1 emergency-response system, including more than 17,000 9-1-1 call takers, dispatchers, and Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) directors and managers; more than 50 state and territorial 9-1-1 administrators; and dozens of 9-1-1 technology and solutions vendors.

Our members work around the clock to provide the public with a reliable lifeline to emergency services. We handle more than 240 million 9-1-1 calls per year, with our members serving as the *first* first responders during almost every emergency. We're on duty during earthquakes, hurricanes, wildfires, civil unrest, and even pandemics, always working to ensure that those who need police, fire, EMS, and other crucial services have immediate access to them.

However, most state, local, and tribal 9-1-1 agencies lack the resources they need to provide such services on a daily basis *and* invest in Next Generation 9-1-1 (NG9-1-1) systems that would reduce response times, increase field-responder safety, and, ultimately, save American lives and property. Moreover, the fact that these public safety heroes work out of sight often means their needs go unrecognized by decision makers at all levels of government.

As the 117th Congress tackles its action agenda, we call upon you to seize the opportunity to reinforce and modernize America's 9-1-1 systems. Specifically, we urge you to:

1. Establish a federal commitment to deploy Next Generation 9-1-1 in every community and create a federal NG9-1-1 grant program; and
2. Direct the Executive Branch to reclassify Public Safety Telecommunicators as public safety personnel, not clerical workers.

America's 9-1-1 system today is a patchwork of mostly under-funded, 20th-century landline-based systems staffed by under-valued (yet skilled and passionate) professionals who rely largely on one source of information – a caller's voice – to gather information about emergencies. These shortcomings keep 9-1-1 from saving countless lives every year, yet they

can easily be overcome by reclassifying 9-1-1 professionals and equipping them with modern NG9-1-1 technology.

NG9-1-1 systems support multimedia communications between the public, 9-1-1 centers, and field responders. NG9-1-1 enables faster, more accurate location of callers; automated data-sharing from multiple sources (smartphones, home alarm systems, smart city sensors, autonomous vehicles, and more); and improved dispatching of appropriate public-safety resources, including seamless call transfers across local, state, and even national boundaries. NG9-1-1 also provides for automatic rollovers when 9-1-1 centers are knocked offline by natural or man-made disasters, which we have seen all too often in recent years.

However, in most jurisdictions, the money for NG9-1-1 upgrades is just not there. America's 9-1-1 systems are hobbled by a lack of funding at state, local, and tribal levels, where almost all 9-1-1-related decisions are made. Budget constraints caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated this situation.

For these reasons, we call on you to lead the nation on this issue and support legislation to provide states with a one-time infusion of funds to transition to NG9-1-1, allowing all Americans seamless access to advanced 9-1-1 services in their times of need, regardless of where they live, work, or travel. Enclosed with this letter is proposed language for a *Next Generation 9-1-1 Act of 2021* that would carry out this infusion and help achieve the goal of universal, state-of-the-art NG9-1-1 in the United States. This language has been developed by the national associations representing 9-1-1 — NENA, the National Association of State 9-1-1 Administrators (NASNA), and the Industry Council for Response Technologies (iCERT); and builds on the widely agreed-upon language of the *Next Generation 9-1-1 Act of 2019*.

Please ensure any NG9-1-1 legislation is introduced and enacted with only the minor adjustments contained in the attached language. Other organizations are circulating alternate proposals that could cripple NG9-1-1 implementation, strand billions of dollars already invested in existing NG9-1-1 deployments, and create cybersecurity risks for state, local and tribal governments.

We also call on you to reintroduce and support the Supporting Accurate Views of Emergency Services Act (911 SAVES Act, H.R. 1629 And S. 1015 in the last Congress), which would direct the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to reclassify public safety telecommunicators as a "Protective Services" occupation under the Standard Occupational Classification System (SOCS). This bipartisan bill, which passed the U.S. House in 2018 and finished last session with 130 House sponsors and 30 sponsors in the Senate, would cost nothing; would improve the government's data collection and analysis efforts; and most importantly, would give an estimated 100,000 public safety telecommunicators located in every community across America the respect and support they deserve.

We appreciate your willingness to work with the 9-1-1 community to find solutions to these concerns. We stand ready to offer our expertise and perspective. Please contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

/s/

Brian Fontes
CEO
NENA: The 9-1-1 Association