Written Testimony of
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Hearing on
***Making Public Lands Safer Act* (H.R. 7031)**
before the U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
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Thank you, Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the subcommittee. I am honored to be here to testify.

As president of the National Emergency Number Association, I speak on behalf of the organization's more than 25,000 members across the United States and Canada.

I come before you today to urge the swift passage of the *Making Public Lands Safer Act* (H.R. 7031).

If enacted, this bill would instruct the Department of the Interior to study the costs of deploying Next Generation 9-1-1 infrastructure at the National Park Service's Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) and to develop an implementation plan.

As both the President of NENA and a 9-1-1 professional with over 30 years experience in public safety communications, I can attest to the life-saving benefits of Next Generation 9-1-1, or NextGen 9-1-1.

NextGen 9-1-1 is not a single product, vendor, or network, but rather a system of interoperable systems built through cooperation, coordination, and open standards.

NG9-1-1 also includes enhanced cybersecurity protection, redundancy, and increased resiliency during natural or man-made disasters.

Our nation's 9-1-1 systems – the critical link in any emergency, whether in a national park, a private home, or an office — largely run on 1960s copper-wire technology that lacks interoperability and coordination.

This infrastructure was built to handle public voice calls and relay the information to dispatch.

Because this technology is voice-centric, crucial information such as precise location, medical information, or, in some cases, crash telemetry is stripped away when calling 9-1-1.

NENA estimates that nearly 90% of all 9-1-1 calls now come from wireless devices. These devices can send life-saving information to PSAPs, such as medical information, precise location data, automobile accident data, context-providing videos, text messages, and more.

Like most Americans, I use my phone not just for communication but also as my primary camera, especially when I'm on vacation.

Our nation's parks are world famous for their beauty and vistas, and many visitors carry their phones to capture moments with friends and family.

But in an emergency, they will use those same phones to call 9-1-1. In many instances, a local PSAP would be the nearest point of contact for a 9-1-1 call within a national park.

If that PSAP does not have an emergency services IP network and other core components of NG9-1-1, it cannot seamlessly transfer data to the Park Police PSAP.

In such cases, the 9-1-1 Public Safety Telecommunicator must dial a separate 10-digit number and verbally relay the information, which can cause unacceptable delays in emergency response and reduce field responders' situational awareness.

More importantly for national parks, many visitors are tourists unfamiliar with the terrain or their exact location.

Precise device location is critical to finding those in need when they cannot describe where they are.

Even if the PSAP has *some* NG9-1-1 features, such as an ESInet, and can receive data, it often cannot efficiently transfer that information to another PSAP lacking an ESInet.

This problem is especially critical for 9-1-1 responses across our country's many national parks.

When emergencies occur at national parks, several centers, agencies, or responders are dispatched to handle a single incident, such as a wildfire or other natural disaster.

Being able to share information across agencies means first responders can arrive on time to save lives and property.

In my own PSAP in Monterey County, California, we received a call from a hiker within Point Lobos State Park after dark.

Our dispatcher, Donald Clark, using technologies that incorporated NG9-1-1 elements, was able to pinpoint the caller's location and stayed on the line with her for 24 minutes, providing detailed turn-by-turn directions until the caller reached her parked vehicle.

This wouldn't be possible without NextGen 9-1-1.

Mr. Chairman, that is why we must deploy NextGen now in our national parks and communities by enacting H.R. 7031, the *Making Public Lands Safer Act*, sponsored by Representative Fulcher.

However, we must ensure that process doesn't start and finish with the Parks Service.

NENA has long advocated for nationwide deployment of NG9-1-1. This ecosystem will only truly work when 9-1-1 centers across the country can acquire the necessary technology.

We commend bipartisan efforts to create a nationwide grant program for NG9-1-1 deployment by Representatives Richard Hudson and Troy Carter in the House, and Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tedd Budd in the Senate.

We have waited too long for this deployment, and we need Congress to act now to ensure that every American, no matter where they are, has access to life-saving emergency response during their time of need.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, today 9-1-1 operates very differently.

9-1-1 public safety telecommunicators perform many functions beyond simply relaying information and dispatching. They assist with medical triage, provide crucial situational awareness to field responders, and also deliver life-saving information or procedures to callers.

Our 9-1-1 professionals are currently misclassified as *administrative or clerical* staff, similar to receptionists, secretaries, or other administrative workers, rather than as *public safety personnel* like their field responder colleagues. This misclassification is a clear relic of legacy 9-1-1 systems—when the public called, 9-1-1 answered, and just dispatched.

9-1-1 professionals handle medical triage, including CPR, and provide crucial situational awareness to field responders.

They undergo rigorous training to learn the many standards, technologies, and procedures they must follow.

Representative Norma Torres, a former dispatcher herself, and Representative Brian Fitzpatrick, along with Senators Marsha Blackburn and Amy Klobuchar, have long championed the 9-1-1 SAVES Act.

This no-cost bill would reclassify 9-1-1 telecommunicators as what they truly are, Public Safety Personnel.

These professionals support us during our most harrowing moments and share in the trauma we experience at that time.

As such, we should be recognized alongside their colleagues in field response as Public Safety Personnel.

On September 10, 2025, the Senate, by unanimous consent, passed its companion bill, the *Enhancing First Response Act* (S. 725).

On behalf of the tens of thousands of 9-1-1 professionals nationwide, I urge you to pass S.725 under suspension of the rules. This reclassification is not separate from NG9-1-1. The pending legislation emphasizes that our 9-1-1 professionals are part of our emergency response network and truly are the nation's *first* first responders.

Thank you for your attention to these important issue of Next Generation 9-1-1 in our nation's parks, and I look forward to answering any questions.

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