



PENNSYLVANIA FIRE & EMERGENCY SERVICES INSTITUTE

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Pennsylvania Fire & Emergency Services Institute
Harrisburg, PA 17101

House Consumer Affairs Committee

May 25, 2021

Testimony from Jerry Brant, Board Member

Good Morning, my name is Jerry Brant, and I am a member of the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Fire & Emergency Services Institute. In June, I will celebrate fifty two years in the volunteer fire service. I currently serve as the Second Assistant Chief of the Patton Fire Company #1 of Patton Borough in Cambria County.

I am also a Life Member of the Hope Fire Company of Northern Cambria where I held the office of Chief for fifteen years. I am the founder of Decoplan Associates LLC which is a firm focused on planning, consulting and grant writing for emergency services agencies and municipal governments. My business takes me across the country interacting with emergency service providers.

Patton Fire Company provides a full complement of fire and rescue services to two boroughs and four townships in rural north central Cambria County that is home to 7,500 year-round residents. We cover 98.9 square miles from one station utilizing 42 active firefighters to answer approximately 200 alarms per year. We operate an engine rescue, a tanker, a tower, and a quick attack. We are one of two departments that provides coverage to Prince Gallitzin State Park which now attracts over 1.8 million visitors annually.

When I joined the fire service in 1969 the last thing on any firefighter's mind was something called connectivity. A telephone was an object connected to the wall or sitting on someone's desk. At our house we had a party line that we shared with the family across the street. My high school had one computer. It was the size of a refrigerator and only a select group of students had access to it. Many of the departments in my area operated with Citizens Band radios. There were no 911 centers and if you were operating at a fire and you needed more fire departments, you searched for the nearest house and used their



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telephone to call the emergency number for additional support.

Today, it is imperative that a first responder remains connected – connected to your fellow first responders, connected to command centers, and connected to your community. In a world where connectivity is more essential than ever before, it makes sense that those who are tasked with protecting our communities be as connected as possible. This is why the members of the Pennsylvania Fire & Emergency Services Institute are supportive of legislation that will improve Pennsylvania’s wireless networks and allow first responders to keep everyone safe and better prepared to respond to emergency situations.

To facilitate this Pennsylvania needs legislation that would streamline the deployment of small cells—small, wireless antenna that will serve as the backbone for 5G technology and assist the applications that 5G networks will support. Amplifying traditional cell phone towers and underpinned by fiber optics, small cells can be inconspicuously installed on existing infrastructure such as utility poles and lamp posts. Installing small cells provides consumers with increased data capacity and improved wireless connectivity, resulting in safer and smarter communities.

Today, 80% of 911 calls originate from a mobile device, and nearly 50% of PA households no longer maintain a landline. When an emergency arises having a reliable connection is a necessity. For first responders, having reliable communications infrastructure - like small cells - helps us perform to the best of our ability in those emergency situations. Response crews will be able to relay video or pictures via helmet cameras or other wireless devices in real-time to personnel at command centers. They will also have wireless access to building schematics or other critical information in a fraction of a second, not to mention the ability to access enhanced location-based services when responding to 911 calls.

But even when not onsite, reliable connectivity is vital to public safety. Through the Wireless Emergency Alerts system, which alerts residents of emergency situations in their areas, the need to reach those residents is of up-most-importance. Since its launch in 2012, the FCC reports that the system has been used more than 40,000 times to warn the public about dangerous weather, missing children, and other critical situations—all through alerts on mobile phones.

To date, 31 states, including Ohio, West Virginia, and Delaware, have enacted legislation to address small cell development. Moreover, they have done so in an overwhelmingly bipartisan fashion, often passing legislation unanimously. However, the longer our Legislature takes to act on this subject, the further we as a Commonwealth fall behind. 5G-enabled



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devices are available for purchase, yet Pennsylvania has failed to create a regulatory environment that facilitates a swift buildout of 5G networks. Ultimately, private investment in small cell deployment by wireless carriers is occurring in states where state legislation has already been adopted. Consequently, Pennsylvania's first responders, businesses and schools will not be properly equipped to best serve our communities. For all these reasons I implore you to move forward with legislation that addresses the deployment of 5G.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Respectfully,

Jerry Brant, Executive Board Member

Pennsylvania Fire & Emergency Services Institute