

## Congressional subcommittee pushes for FirstNet timeline, more SWICs

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November 20, 2014

Members of Congress pressed [FirstNet](#) Acting General Manager TJ Kennedy for a projected timeframe regarding the state-consultation process during Tuesday's U.S. House Homeland Security subcommittee hearing on the progress of interoperable communications since the tragic events of 9/11.

Rep. Susan W. Brooks (R-Ind.), chairman of the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications, asked Kennedy how the meetings were progressing and when he expected to complete them.

Kennedy, who has served as FirstNet's acting general manager since [Bill D'Agostino resigned as general manager in April](#), said he expects that there will be four phases in the consultation process.

"The only one I can really comment on right now is phase one, and I believe that, in this fiscal year, we will complete the first phase one for each of the states," Kennedy said during the hearing, which was webcast. "Every state is moving at a different timeframe as far as checklists and ability to get [them] in. A lot of it is also at the mercy of when states are ready to have those conversations."

So far, the agency has had the initial meeting with eight of the 32 states that are currently ready for consultation, Kennedy said. These meetings started with FirstNet's meeting with Maryland officials in July, and they will be continued in 2015.

Kennedy has said repeatedly that the federal government's hiring process and regulations have slowed the agency's efforts to acquire key talent and technical expertise.

While FirstNet has come a long way during the past year, the buildout of the network remains a

distant goal. Currently, the earliest projected timeline for a request for proposal (RFP) to be issued is at the end of 2015.

“We’ve been on the message of FirstNet for a couple of years now, and with the change in leadership, I think it’s been a little bit slow, to be honest,” Mark A. Grubb, director of communications for the Delaware Department of Safety and Homeland Security and the state’s SWIC and the single point of contact (SPOC) for FirstNet, said during the hearing.

“But it’s understandable due to the size of the project that they’re undertaking—it’s astronomical. I think our folks in the state are getting just a little bit leery of the message that FirstNet is coming. We need to get it here.”

Also at the hearing, Rep. Donald M. Payne Jr. (D-N.J.) announced proposed [legislation](#) that would require states to have an appointed Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC) or have someone tasked with carrying out SWIC duties. If the SWIC Enhancement Act passes, states would not be able to benefit from the State Homeland Security Grant Program without providing proof that someone is responsible for [interoperability](#).

SWICs were created as part of the Homeland Security’s Office of Emergency Communication’s 2008 National Emergency Communications Plan, but the number of full-time SWICs has decreased significantly in recent history.

In 2010, there were 44 full-time SWICs. As of March of this year, that number was down to 26, although every state has at least a part-time SWIC, OEC Director Ronald Hewitt told the subcommittee.

Grubb said it is important that the individual not only be a full-time SWIC, but the person should serve in high-level role within each state. Otherwise, there’s a tendency for low-level SWICs to be “brushed under the table for the most part,” he said.

Without having someone dedicated to progressing [interoperability](#) , it's unlikely to happen, Grubb said.

“Those are the things that we saw prior to 9/11—there was no coordinator,” Grubb said. “There was no champion of coordination for the states, and we’re heading back in that direction, unfortunately.”

Payne, who is the ranking member on the subcommittee, said he hopes his bill will prevent that happening.

“This legislation will ensure that states maintain the progress we have made toward achieving interoperability by preserving the governing structures necessary to make their communications technology work,” Payne said during the hearing.

“These structures are key to achieving interoperability using existing technology and networks and to realizing the potential of the national public-safety broadband network.”

The entirety of Kennedy’s written testimony for the hearing can be read [here](#) .

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