

Pennsylvania official outlines state requirements for FirstNet regarding control, coverage and priority issues

Urgent Communications By Donny Jackson

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Pennsylvania officials want input into the manner in which the [FirstNet](#) public-safety broadband network is deployed and operated within the state borders, Major Diane Stackhouse of the Pennsylvania State Police said during a recent webinar.

“I’d like to take a look at it as a FirstNet and PA partnership for an opt-in strategy—it’s a win-win for everyone,” Stackhouse said during the [IWCE’s Urgent Communications](#) webinar, which was sponsored by InfoVista and can be accessed on demand by [clicking here](#)

. “But Pennsylvania definitely has certain requirements and needs.”

One of these is the ability to have some level of control regarding priority and preemption on the FirstNet system within the state’s jurisdiction—something the state police is prepared to do, because it already has a network operations centers (NOC) that operates around the clock to oversee a statewide LMR network, Stackhouse said.

“Within our borders, we want to have some control and access to priority and preemption issues,” she said.

From the outset of its organization, FirstNet officials have expressed the intent to give public-safety agencies “local control” of their use of the proposed broadband system, but details about how such an arrangement would work have not been established yet.

Stackhouse said that Pennsylvania officials understand FirstNet’s need to monetize its spectrum assets to make the business model economically viable, but she stressed that the primary public-safety purpose always should be prioritized.

“We understand that it’s the intention to sell excess capacity, but don’t ever forget that first responders are first,” Stackhouse said. “Pennsylvania decides the needs for coverage and capacity.”

Pennsylvania has assessed its needs by conducting extensive outreach and data-collection initiatives that have revealed several key points, including the challenges associated with providing wireless coverage in the heavily wooded areas that are commonplace in the northern part of the state, Stackhouse said. [FirstNet](#) has provided Pennsylvania with an initial coverage assessment, but state officials believe greater coverage is needed, based on data associated with calls for service, population density, critical-infrastructure locations, and transportation factors, she said.

“We have found a 16% increase using these areas of assessment over the baseline provided to us by FirstNet,” Stackhouse said. “I think that our re-baseline is definitely more appropriate to the first responders in Pennsylvania.”

Other key requirements cited by Stackhouse include the following:

- Technical standards that do not use proprietary technology within the network and that establish quality-of-service specifications that meet the needs of first responders;
- A quality-assurance program that explains how maintenance and repairs will be done, as well as the expected availability of the network; and
- A system that is priced within the budgets of public-safety agencies. “Obviously, nothing is for free, but it has to be affordable for folks to jump on,” Stackhouse said.

This cost element also is important to Pennsylvania for another reason, which is related to the opt-out decision that the governor must make within 90 days of FirstNet presenting its state plan. Unless that state plan outlines the costs involved, the 90-day clock on the governor should not start, Stackhouse said.

“We definitely want details, when we present it to our governor for an opt-in/opt-out scenario and the cost to build out in Pennsylvania,” she said. “The 90-day clock, if it doesn’t include cost, I don’t think our governor would be able to make an informed, educated decision on what he should do. So, we ask that cost [information] be included.”

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