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TO: MA Public Safety Leaders
FROM: Curtis Wood, Undersecretary
DATE: December 22, 2017
SUBJECT: Guidance on Purchasing of Priority Public Safety Data Services

Today, Governor Baker agreed to “opt in” to the State Plan prepared by the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) and its national vendor, AT&T, for public safety wireless data services here in Massachusetts. EOPSS has been working this summer to improve the FirstNet/AT&T plan and are hopeful that it will provide a valuable option for public safety data communications in Massachusetts.

I want to use this opportunity to clarify some misunderstandings about FirstNet and to answer some of the questions we have heard from public safety officials like yourself. Please share this correspondence with your respective stakeholder groups and other public safety officials as you deem appropriate.

What Is the FirstNet State Plan and What Does This Have to Do With AT&T?

In 2016, FirstNet went out to bid for a national vendor to implement the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN). After a lengthy review, FirstNet selected AT&T as its vendor. Their first joint activities were to put together plans for how the AT&T data services would be made available within each state. The results were the various FirstNet State Plans. These plans envision expansions in coverage and features of the AT&T data network that will take place over the next five years.

The AT&T State Plan for Massachusetts includes improved coverage, competitive data plans, and public safety services like priority and preemption over its other customers.

Does “Opting In” Mean the Governor Has Endorsed These Services?

No. “Opting in” is a procedural agreement to allow FirstNet and AT&T to build the public safety network in Massachusetts, as opposed to building it ourselves. It is not an endorsement. While we are hopeful that the new FirstNet data services will be successful here in

Massachusetts, there are many aspects of the State Plan and AT&T's commitment to the Commonwealth that we will still need to see implemented before any recommendation could be made to adopt these services.

Is AT&T the Only Company That Will Be Providing These Services?

Yes and No. AT&T is the official partner of FirstNet, but there is no restriction on other carriers also providing similar services. This summer, Verizon Wireless announced that it plans to provide first responders with priority access on its network free of charge. Other carriers may make similar announcements. There may be future services, though, that only AT&T, as FirstNet's official partner, can provide. That has yet to be seen.

When Will These Services Be Available?

AT&T will immediately begin offering FirstNet services, which are essentially new cellular/LTE plans on their existing network. Over the past several months, AT&T has implemented priority access for public safety users and "ruthless preemption" in the event public safety needs more bandwidth to communicate during a crisis. Over time, AT&T will be adding dedicated public safety spectrum (Band 14) to their existing towers and constructing new sites for additional coverage. Verizon Wireless already offers priority service to its public safety customers.

Do I Need to Buy FirstNet Services?

No. The decision on what data services your agencies uses is up to you. AT&T and other vendors need to earn your service. You may pick the provider you think best serves your organization and your community. There is also no time pressure on your decision. If you are comfortable with your current services, you can keep them as long as you want or until you see a compelling reason to switch to another vendor.

Will I Be Able to Access the CJIS Network if We Switch Wireless Providers?

You should. We are working with AT&T to enable secure CJIS access for its customers.

Will the State Public Safety Agencies Buy FirstNet Plans?

Not necessarily. As with your agency, the decision on whether or not to switch to the FirstNet/AT&T plans will depend on the nature of the offered services, the coverage available, and the overall costs of data plans. It may be the case that some state agencies switch and others remain with their current carrier or carriers. The decision on whether an agency will switch services to the AT&T/FirstNet plans will be largely driven by whether or not AT&T can successfully demonstrate what it has promised in the FirstNet State Plan. This includes expanded coverage (indoors and outdoors), lower data plan costs, and responsiveness to public safety needs.

Who Do I Contact If I Have Questions?

Contact the EOPSS Public Safety Broadband Office (PSBO) at psbo@state.ma.us if you have any questions about the FirstNet State Plan or the new data plans offered by AT&T and others.