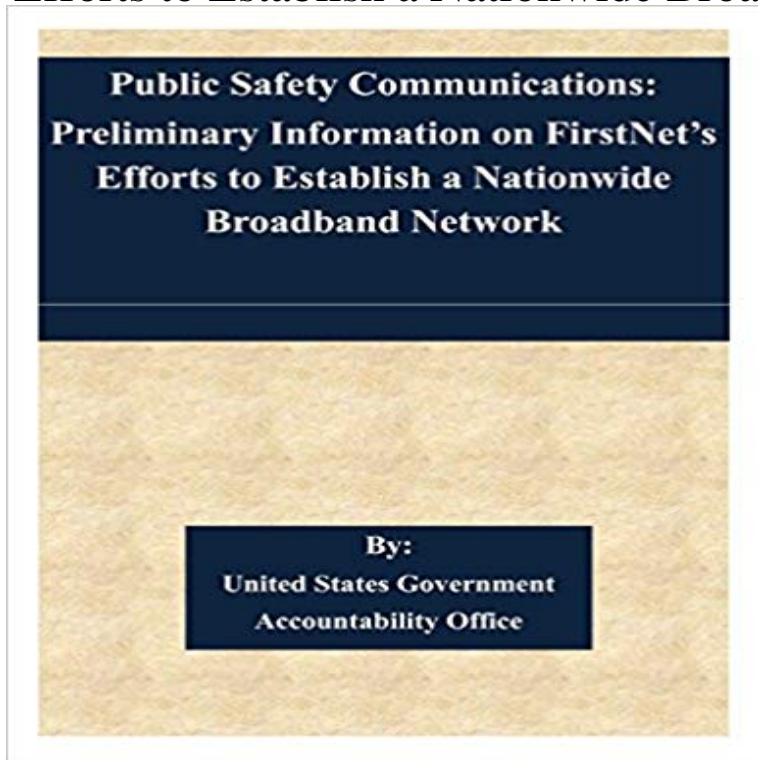


Public Safety Communications: Preliminary Information on FirstNets Efforts to Establish a Nationwide Broadband Network



GAOs ongoing work has found that the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) has made progress carrying out the responsibilities established in the 2012 Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act (the 2012 act) but lacks certain elements of effective internal controls. FirstNet has made progress establishing an organizational structure, planning the nationwide public-safety broadband network, and consulting with stakeholders. Nevertheless, stakeholders GAO contacted cited upcoming issues, such as deciding the level of network coverage, which will be difficult for FirstNet to address as it continues to carry out its responsibilities. With respect to internal controls, FirstNet has begun establishing policies and practices consistent with federal standards, but it has not fully assessed its risks or established Standards of Conduct. Given that FirstNet faces a multitude of risks to achieve its complex objectives, fully assessing risks would help FirstNet respond to risks in a proactive way. Developing standards of conduct would help FirstNet address conduct and performance issues in a timely manner. A nationwide public-safety broadband network is estimated to cost billions of dollars, and FirstNet faces difficult decisions determining how to fund the networks construction and ongoing operations. Various entities have estimated the cost to construct and operate such a network from \$12 to \$47 billion over the first 10 years. The actual cost of FirstNets network will be influenced by FirstNets (1) business model, especially the extent of commercial partnerships; (2) use of existing infrastructure; (3) efforts to ensure network reliability; and (4) network coverage. For example, the cost of the network will likely increase if FirstNet does not utilize commercial partnerships and at least some existing infrastructure. The 2012 act provides FirstNet \$7 billion

to establish the network. To become self-funding, FirstNet is authorized to generate revenue through user fees and commercial partnerships, the latter of which can involve secondary use of the network for non-public safety services. However, GAOs ongoing work suggests that FirstNet faces difficult decisions in determining how to best utilize these revenue sources. For instance, widespread network coverage can attract more users, and thus user fee revenue, but is expensive to construct and maintain, especially in rural areas. A nationwide public-safety broadband network is estimated to cost billions of dollars, and FirstNet faces difficult decisions determining how to fund the networks construction and ongoing operations. Various entities have estimated the cost to construct and operate such a network from \$12 to \$47 billion over the first 10 years. The actual cost of FirstNets network will be influenced by FirstNets (1) business model, especially the extent of commercial partnerships; (2) use of existing infrastructure; (3) efforts to ensure network reliability; and (4) network coverage. For example, the cost of the network will likely increase if FirstNet does not utilize commercial partnerships and at least some existing infrastructure. The 2012 act provides FirstNet \$7 billion to establish the network. To become self-funding, FirstNet is authorized to generate revenue through user fees and commercial partnerships, the latter of which can involve secondary use of the network for non-public safety services. However, GAOs ongoing work suggests that FirstNet faces difficult decisions in determining how to best utilize these revenue sources. For instance, widespread network coverage can attract more users, and thus user fee revenue, but is expensive to construct and maintain, especially in rural areas.

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