

April 3, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Democratic Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator McConnell, Senator Schumer, Senator Wicker, and Senator Cantwell:

Across the country, public safety personnel are on the front lines of the coronavirus pandemic. Many of these brave women and men rely on the spectrum known as “T-Band” to communicate with each other and do their jobs on behalf of the public. Unfortunately, existing law requires the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to begin to auction off the T-Band by February 2021. As a result, public safety departments throughout the nation have been forced to begin making costly plans to move off the T-Band in a time when their valuable time and resources are needed to fight an evolving public health crisis. We write to urge you to include in the next coronavirus stimulus bill the *Don't Break Up the T-Band Act* (S.2748), language repealing the T-Band auction mandate.

Access to T-Band spectrum is essential to first responders' ability to protect the public and keep the American people healthy and safe. In eleven major metropolitan areas, the T-Band communication system enables public safety voice communications.¹ It allows emergency medical services (EMS) teams to relay important information about patients' conditions. It permits 911 dispatchers to send first responders to emergency scenes. And fire fighters use it to quickly coordinate strategy.

Over the past five decades, public safety agencies from coast to coast have spent billions of dollars in federal, state, and local taxpayer money to construct T-Band systems that are interoperable and meet mission-critical voice requirements.² Many T-Band users do not have alternative communications spectrum, and should the T-Band auction mandate remain in place, current estimates suggest it would cost between \$5 billion and \$6 billion for localities to move off the spectrum. The proceeds of any T-Band auction proceeds would not come close to covering these costs.³ At a time when first responders already face enormous pressure and economic strain to address the pandemic, the last thing we should do is saddle them with millions of dollars in costs to needlessly alter their critical communications systems.

Congress owes it to our first responders to give them the tools they need to do their jobs. Therefore, we ask you to include the *Don't Break Up the T-Band Act*, which would repeal Section 6103 in Title VI of P.L. 112-96, in any upcoming legislative response to the ongoing public health crisis. More than a dozen groups, including the International Association of Fire Chiefs, International Association of Fire Fighters, National Association of Counties,

¹ Government Accountability Office, *Required Auction of Public Safety Spectrum Could Harm First Responder Capabilities* (June 21, 2019), <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/699916.pdf>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

National League of Cities, United States Conference of Mayors, and National Sheriffs' Association, have expressly called on you to include this legislation in any upcoming response to the coronavirus outbreak, and it is critical that we heed these calls.⁴

Preserving access to the T-Band is nothing short of a public safety imperative, and Congress has erred in not repealing the auction mandate in responses to the coronavirus thus far. It is past time to act on behalf of our first responders. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

⁴ Letter from the International Association of Fire Chiefs and others to Congressional Leadership (March 18, 2020), https://www.iafc.org/docs/default-source/1gr/t-band-coalition-letter---covid19-package_final_3-18-20.pdf?sfvrsn=b418920d_2.