

Why Supporting Broadband Is an Investment in Our Homeland Security and Public Safety

In the 21st century, robust high-speed broadband connectivity and internet capacity are fundamental to U.S. homeland security and public safety. Broadband helps our government and its citizens prepare for, respond to, and recover from major natural disasters, pandemics, acts of terrorism, and cyberattacks. Improving public safety officials' ability to address such crises in real time will save countless lives and mitigate the risks and subsequent economic costs of these massive catastrophes. Unfortunately, broadband is still not available and affordable for all first responders and citizens, which is why Congress must prioritize policies that promote broadband access and adoption.

In 2017, Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria [affected nearly 50 million Americans and cost roughly \\$300 billion](#). These tragedies followed [nine other billion-dollar natural disasters](#) that year alone. In the aftermath, [FEMA acknowledged systemic failures](#), including difficulties coordinating and communicating with local officials, as partially to blame for the most expensive emergency responses in U.S. history. Broadband services can help address these challenges and shortcomings while ensuring that emergency response teams are able to communicate with and aid Americans in need.

During the Boston Marathon bombings, investigators experienced difficulties sharing "big data packages" with partners, "particularly the videos that proved to be so significant" to resolving the case, [according to the former deputy undersecretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#). Despite these warnings, public safety communications networks still lack the necessary broadband support that response teams rely on to keep us safe. We should invest in broadband access and adoption now -- for our nation's homeland security and public safety -- rather than react and rebuild after the next crisis.

How Broadband Infrastructure Protects Americans Every Day

- Broadband empowers first responders everywhere by upgrading local network connections to an internet-based system, which prevents [communication blackouts between coordinating officials and victims during emergencies](#). It also offers better real-time data sharing capabilities, such as the [use of handheld devices to download building designs before arriving at the scene of a crisis](#).
- "[Next-generation 911](#)" and [emergency alert systems](#), which can process multimedia data like video and photos, depend on broadband, too. These systems [allow citizens to flag emergencies](#) by sending multimedia messages to a 911 call center that can then be quickly routed to nearby police to respond. It also ensures that all Americans will be notified promptly with critical information by emergency services in the event of an [incoming earthquake](#) or tornado.
- For loved ones with health issues, broadband can support the use of [Wi-Fi-enabled biomedical devices, like defibrillators](#), to automatically call 911 during a medical emergency, or an [automatic car collision notification system](#), to dispatch help to an accident. These quick actions can be life-saving -- response [delays of even seconds can allow a small electrical spark to turn into a severe fire](#), and [every passing minute without CPR and defibrillation decreases the chances of survival by up to 7-10%](#).