

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

Received & Inspected

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FCC Mail Room

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November 30, 2015

Chairman Tom Wheeler
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler:

We are writing about an important public safety issue that has been brought to our attention by our constituents. The northeast corner of Vermont, which borders Canada and New Hampshire, is one of the most rural, mountainous, and economically challenged areas of the state. This area, known locally as the Northeast Kingdom, is primarily served by volunteer fire departments, along with one small career fire department and a mix of volunteer and paid emergency medical services (EMS) agencies.

According to our constituents, there are significant deficiencies in radio communications and interoperability between the various fire and EMS departments in the region. In a coordinated effort to improve public safety communications, eleven fire departments and three EMS agencies want to install a repeater on Burke Mountain. Two years ago, the Town of St. Johnsbury applied to the FCC for a license for a 100-watt repeater, but the FCC only granted one for 40 watts. A coverage study found that 40 watts would not significantly improve communication capacity, so the group declined to move forward on the project.

The applicants believe that their request for a 100-watt license may have been rejected because of concerns of radio interference on Canadian frequencies. However, they note that other departments in the region have repeaters in locations north of Burke Mountain, closer to the Canadian border. Additionally, they frequently hear interference from Canadian taxi companies.


We cannot stress enough how important this issue is for public safety in the region. Six miles of Interstate 91 in Vermont are completely silent, and coverage in some towns is extremely spotty. Moreover, absent a 100-watt repeater, local public safety agencies have had to purchase several smaller repeaters that have affected their already strained budgets.

We understand that the licensing decision may have been subject to international agreements, but given the importance of effective public safety communication, we respectfully request more information why the application was denied. We would also like to know whether there is an appeal process to pursue a license for a 100-watt repeater.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator


BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator


PETER WELCH
United States Representative