



Testimony of
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Senators, Members, Guests, fellow panelists, good morning and thank you for allowing us to address this joint hearing regarding matters of emergency communications. I am Tom Gross, Chief of Police of the York Area Regional Police Department, I am also a member of the Executive Board of the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association and the Executive Committee of the International Chiefs of Police Association

I would like to briefly familiarize you with my perspective regarding the current status of local law enforcement radio communications in the Commonwealth and then answer any questions you may have. Currently with regard to the statewide radio system, there is little interaction between local police officers and that system. Most local police agencies communicate on two way radio systems operated by countywide emergency dispatch centers. There are also those agencies that maintain their own individual communications systems and still others that operate via a system maintained by a small group of municipalities

In my own department, we, as well as all of the other police departments in York County are using a P25 digital trunked radio system in the T Band, 500 Mhz spectrum operated by the York County Department of Emergency Services. This is a digital radio system that has been operated for approximately five years and was initially installed by MAACOM, now Harris Corporation. While there were definitely a high number of coverage issues with the initial startup of this system, it was gradually reduced to the current level which is sporadic although there are definitely a certain amount of coverage lapses. The county also supports our in car computers which provide computer dispatching, access to JNet and also access to our department records management system.

With regard to radio communications interoperability in York County, the departments can all access a series of Talk Around (TAC) Channels and we have the capability to access other radio channels in order to communicate with Fire, Fire Police, etc. As for communication with the Pennsylvania State Police, there is a quick key on the mobile radios in the vehicles and there is a selection available on the portable radios.

While this does work and it is available, I would say that the radios are not known for their simplicity. As an example, I asked a lieutenant, 2 sergeants, and a corporal how they would switch their portable and mobile radio to talk to PSP and my informal test resulted in one sergeant who didn't know, a corporal who knew it could be done, but didn't know how, the lieutenant knew we could do it in the car, and the other sergeant was familiar with the procedure on both the portable and car radio. This is probably better than many departments in the Commonwealth as I suspect that there are many who do not have currently have the same capability for direct interagency radio communications and would have to have some sort of a "patch" through their communications center. It is my understanding, however, that the State Police can also change to our channels and can do so in other counties as well. I cannot testify as to the level of reliability for that at their end of the operation.

As for the future of these radio communications at both the state police level and local police, I would emphasize that the one feature that seems to be most difficult to accomplish in all of these systems is simplicity of use. In the situations that we face in law enforcement, the most stressful incidents are those that often require multi-agency radio interoperability and at these times it is most difficult to remember more than a step or two to get to the right setting for that to occur. I recall a recent incident where I responded to a shooting and as I was standing there trying to change to another channel and take my radio off scan I asked another officer and it took both of us several attempts before we figured it out. Mission-critical voice communications will remain as the most important part of our radio needs well into the future and that need must be met as fully as possible for the emergency services.

I also would like to mention and reinforce to the committee members that there is a new initiative that will require the attention of emergency services professionals in our Commonwealth and will be having an effect on emergency communications and that is the FirstNet network. FirstNet was created by the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act passed by congress in February of 2012. The law created this board under the

U.S. Department of Commerce and is to be funded by the proceeds of auctions of spectrum to occur in 2014. FirstNet will be providing a broadband data network that should provide available space for high speed data, commercial grade voice and eventually a goal of mission-critical LTE voice. This law also provides that some of the spectrum that is to be auctioned is spectrum that is already in use by emergency services and that may require that they will have to move to other spectrum. This is the case in York County and these moves are planned to be funded by the sales mentioned above. My understanding of this undertaking is limited, but I raise it today so the members can become familiar with this new initiative and the depth and complexity which it may present for future decisions regarding emergency service communications as well as the funding of those systems.

I would close by emphasizing once more that we strive for simplicity, reliability, and ease of interoperability in mission-critical voice communications and we will be happy to answer any questions or provide any additional information which you may require.