



THE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE
Washington, D.C. 20230

January 22, 2007

The Honorable John D. Dingell
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Dingell:

Thank you for your interest in the manner in which the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) will be administering the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) grant program created and funded by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-171. The Department of Commerce shares the Committee's commitment to improving the state of interoperable communications among our nation's first responders.

NTIA has aggressively begun to implement the PSIC Program, leveraging its expertise in the area of public safety interoperable communications, cutting-edge communications technologies, and its relationships within the public safety community. Shortly after the President signed the Deficit Reduction Act into law, NTIA initiated the required consultations with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and began meeting with representatives from the public safety community and other stakeholders with an interest in the program. On June 1, 2006, NTIA entered into an agreement with the Department of the Treasury to allow NTIA to borrow necessary funds to implement the program as of October 1, 2006. NTIA has negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding with DHS's Office of Grants and Training that will make the most efficient use of the existing DHS grants infrastructure to assist NTIA in implementing the program.

As the Administration's principal telecommunications policy adviser and federal spectrum manager, NTIA is recognized as having significant expertise in the area of public safety interoperability. The following are examples of NTIA's activities, programs, and initiatives that will directly inform and advance the Department of Commerce's administration of this critical program.

As part of the President's Spectrum Policy Initiative, NTIA has developed a federal/non-federal public safety demonstration program. With the assistance of the federal agencies and the Federal Communications Commission, NTIA examined the operational and cost effectiveness of sharing spectrum and critical communications infrastructure among commercial, federal, state, and local public safety entities. NTIA coordinated with federal agencies, including DHS, to consider existing demonstration programs for use in the pilot program. NTIA evaluated several programs in accordance with selection criteria that include factors such as whether the program demonstrates cost-effectiveness of sharing, whether the program is in existence and funded, and whether the program operates within existing allocations. NTIA announced the selection of the Washington DC Wireless Accelerated Responder Network (WARN) as the first

demonstration program in April 2006. The WARN project allows an interoperable, city-wide, broadband public safety network that provides real time video tools for city-wide remote surveillance, chemical and biological detection and several other emergency related services. The results from this demonstration will be important in the development of a strategic plan for ensuring public safety during emergencies.

Additionally, NTIA has been actively involved in the standards-setting process for public safety communications. It has partnered with agencies and programs such as the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Office of Law Enforcement Standards, DHS's SAFECOM Program, the Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, the Federal Partnership for Interoperable Communications, and DHS Chief Information Officer's Wireless Management Office. NTIA is working daily with prominent members of the public safety community, including representatives of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, International Association of Fire Chiefs, the Association of Public Safety Communication Officials, International Inc., the National Association of State Emergency Medical Services Directors, and the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council. Work is centered on developing a long-term standardized approach for nationwide communications interoperability and information sharing among local, state, and federal public safety agencies, and short-term interim solutions to facilitate communications while the long-term approach is being completed.

NTIA, in consultation with DHS, intends to design the PSIC program as a one-time grant opportunity that will achieve a meaningful improvement in the state of public safety communications interoperability and provide the maximum amount of interoperable communication systems with a minimum of impact to or replacement of existing state, tribal, and local radio communications assets. NTIA has been in discussions with the DHS's SAFECOM Program regarding its existing federal grants guidance on public safety interoperability. NTIA intends to use its existing expertise, its background research from public safety stakeholders, and the SAFECOM public safety communications interoperability "Statement of Requirements" to explore the use of all available technologies that can be used by first responders to advance overall interoperability. NTIA expects to make PSIC grant awards no later than September 30, 2007, as required by the Call Home Act of 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-459.

During these days of heightened security and awareness, public safety agencies are required and expected to serve their citizens as effectively as possible. The Department of Commerce is committed to improving the state of communications interoperability within the United States, and NTIA is working vigorously on various interoperability issues to assist public safety agencies in meeting these expectations.

Sincerely,



Carlos M. Gutiérrez