Statement

of

Corey Gruber

Office of Grants and Training

Before the

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Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Cuellar, Ranking Member Dent, and Members of the Committee, my name is Corey Gruber, and I serve as the Acting Assistant Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Grants and Training (G&T). It is my pleasure to appear before you today to discuss the Department's progress on interoperable communications. Specifically my goal is to provide information on the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program and the way we are coordinating with the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to implement the program.

As you are aware, G&T is responsible for supporting the Department's broader efforts to assist State, local, tribal, and territorial authorities in preventing, deterring, and responding to terrorist acts. G&T interacts directly with State and local jurisdictions and provides a broad array of support to America's State, territorial, and local governments. G&T's support includes grants, coordinated training, exercises, equipment acquisition, and technical assistance. G&T's grant programs were initiated in 1998, and currently provide funds to all 50 States, the District of Columbia, the territories, high-risk Urban Areas, public safety entities, non-governmental and academic institutions, and the private sector.

As you know, G&T will re-align and report to the Administrator of FEMA beginning on March 31st. This will strengthen our service support role to DHS components and our external partners across the full spectrum of homeland security activities.

PROGRESS TOWARD INTEROPERABILITY

From fiscal year (FY) 2003 through FY 2006, G&T has provided more than $2.9 billion for communications interoperability initiatives, making it the largest category of expenditure through the Homeland Security Grant Program due in part to it being one of eight National Priorities under the National Preparedness Goal. We have learned through our partnership with state and local emergency responders that addressing interoperable communications is about more than simply purchasing equipment. In December, the SAFECOM program at DHS completed a comprehensive National Baseline assessment of thousands of state and local emergency response agencies. In addition, throughout 2006 we worked with 75 urban and metropolitan areas to develop tactical interoperable communications plans (TICP), test these plans through full-scale exercise, and assess the results through the development of Tactical Interoperable Communications Scorecards. These scorecards, released in January 2007, provide a tailored assessment of the progress each urban and metropolitan area has individually achieved with its available resources, as well as provide recommendations on how to best improve an area's capabilities in the immediate future using its existing technologies.

In both the Baseline and Scorecard efforts, the findings have shown that interoperable communications equipment is only as effective as the governance structure planning,

operating procedures, and training programs within which it is used. Specific findings and recommendations of the Tactical Scorecard report include:

Governance—Areas with mature governance structures have advanced further in implementing shared systems/solutions that facilitate regional communications. Regionalized strategic plans are largely not in place and should be developed for communications interoperability with careful consideration for how investments can be shared across the region.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)—For many of the urban areas, the DHS TICP assistance developed provided the first formal, region-wide communications interoperability SOPs. Additional steps should be taken to ensure that these procedures (as well as those outlined in the National Incident Management System) are fully instituted at the command and responder levels.

Usage—The proficiency in the use of communications interoperability equipment and accompanying procedures varies by the types of equipment used and is increasingly complex as additional agencies are included in response efforts. In addition, almost no region had completed a communications-focused exercise before the DHS TICP validation exercise, which meant that the areas had no specific practice using their interoperable communications capabilities in a region-wide context.

Throughout the TICP and Scorecard efforts, we have relied heavily on the Interoperable Communications Technical Assistance Program (ICTAP) to support our grantees. ICTAP provides technical assistance and training at no cost to first responders in conjunction with communications equipment purchased with grant funding. This program ensures that first responders understand the scope of their interoperability needs and how to fully utilize new technology. Since its inception in 2003, ICTAP has grown to provide assistance to more than 65 urban and metropolitan areas, and this support proved absolutely critical in the success of the TICP initiative. As outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between DHS and NTIA, grantee technical assistance will continue to be a key component of the PSIC Grant Program as we support the development of statewide plans and the implementation of communications interoperability grants.

INCORPORATING LESSONS LEARNED
As we strive to develop the most effective PSIC Grant Program, DHS initiatives like the Baseline Assessment and TICP Initiative have provided critical data that will be incorporated into the PSIC Grant Program. For example, the use of PSIC funds will be based on a comprehensive planning effort by the state and local agencies, and must provide the flexibility to leverage the tens of billions of dollars in existing communications infrastructure already in place.

Need for Planning: Building on the success of the TICP efforts for local planning, validation and improvement efforts, DHS has developed a statewide planning approach, which each State will be implementing throughout 2007. These statewide plans and the criteria set forth for their development must be the foundation for effective equipment and system purchases.

Flexibility with Use of Funds: The Baseline Assessment and TICP Initiative have also documented that a wide range of communications technologies are currently in use at the State and local levels. The Deficit Reduction Act references interoperability with newly assigned 700 megahertz (MHz) spectrum. DHS and Commerce believe that the Act's language does not limit the grant funds only to 700 MHz systems investments. Rather, we are committed to exploring the use of all available technologies to advance overall public safety interoperability, as long as those technologies will enable first responders to interoperate with the 700 MHz bands in the future.
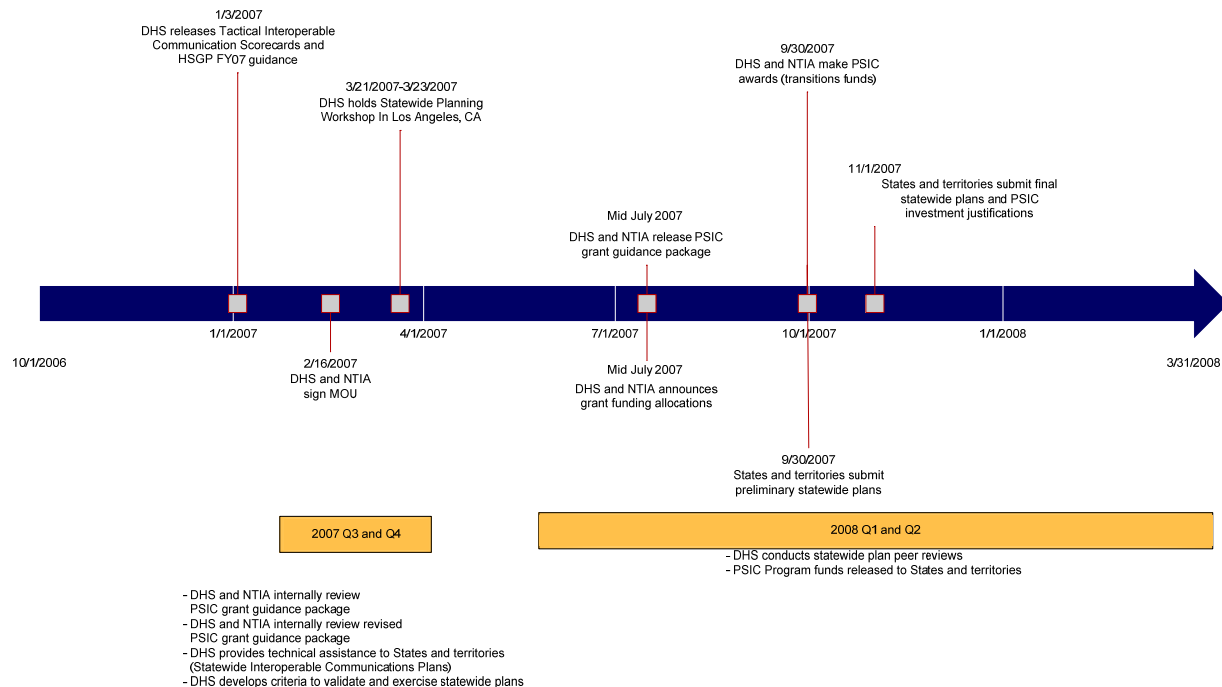
In developing the program plan upon which the MOU was signed, we have taken a thoughtful and developed approach to incorporate the multiple legislative directives and guidance that has been received over the last year, as well as feedback from practitioners and these lessons learned. Specifically, we have worked to reconcile timelines, guidance, and allocation methodologies to meet the goals of making meaningful improvements to public safety interoperable communications.

PSIC GRANT PROGRAM BACKGROUND

Section 3006 of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 directed NTIA, in consultation with DHS, to establish a $1 billion grant program. The purpose of the grant program is to assist public safety agencies in the acquisition of, deployment of, and training for the use of interoperable communications systems that use or enable interoperability with communications systems that use the reallocated public safety spectrum in the 700 MHz band. The Call Home Act of 2006 further amended how the PSIC Grant Program shall be administered by requiring NTIA, in consultation with DHS, to award the PSIC grant funds by no later than September 30, 2007.

Through the Deficit Reduction and Call Home Acts, a partnership was established between DHS and NTIA to develop and implement the PSIC Grant Program. This partnership was affirmed in an MOU signed by each agency on February 16, 2007. Through the MOU, NTIA will transfer PSIC funds to DHS and NTIA will obtain the grant administrative services and expertise of DHS. DHS will support the administration of those funds while NTIA will retain ultimate approval authority over all aspects of the PSIC Grant Program. Through our strong working relationship with NTIA, we outlined a program plan and aggressive schedule of activities for meeting the Call Home Act deadline and as depicted in the timeline below.

Figure 1. PSIC Timeline of 2007 Activities

Timeline events:

- **1/3/2007** — DHS releases Tactical Interoperable Communication Scorecards and HSGP FY07 guidance
- **3/21/2007-3/23/2007** — DHS holds Statewide Planning Workshop In Los Angeles, CA
- **9/30/2007** — DHS and NTIA make PSIC awards (transitions funds)
- **11/1/2007** — States and territories submit final statewide plans and PSIC investment justifications
- **Mid July 2007** — DHS and NTIA release PSIC grant guidance package
- **2/16/2007** — DHS and NTIA sign MOU
- **Mid July 2007** — DHS and NTIA announces grant funding allocations
- **9/30/2007** — States and territories submit preliminary statewide plans

Timeline axis: 10/1/2006 ... 1/1/2007 ... 4/1/2007 ... 7/1/2007 ... 10/1/2007 ... 1/1/2008 ... 3/31/2008

2007 Q3 and Q4
- DHS and NTIA internally review PSIC grant guidance package
- DHS and NTIA internally review revised PSIC grant guidance package
- DHS provides technical assistance to States and territories (Statewide Interoperable Communications Plans)
- DHS develops criteria to validate and exercise statewide plans

2008 Q1 and Q2
- DHS conducts statewide plan peer reviews
- PSIC Program funds released to States and territories

PSIC GOALS AND ADMINISTRATION

The PSIC Grant Program is a one-time opportunity to target specific funds and resources toward improving interoperability with respect to voice and data communications. The goals of the program are two-fold. First, the PSIC Grant Program will support public safety agencies in their acquisition, deployment, and training on interoperable communications systems that use or enable interoperability with communications systems that use the reallocated public safety spectrum in the 700 MHz band. Second, PSIC funds will be used to promote cost- and spectrum-efficient technology solutions so long as those technologies will enable first responders to interoperate with the 700 MHz band in the future. Working together, DHS and NTIA are committed to ensuring that these goals are met as we develop the guidance, criteria, and evaluation processes for the PSIC Grant Program.

As part of our coordinated planning activities, we have determined that achieving these goals requires that PSIC funds build upon the many efforts that DHS, Commerce, as well as state and local agencies themselves, have in motion regarding interoperability. This means that the use of PSIC funds need to be linked to objectives identified in the forthcoming statewide interoperable communications plans, as well as linked to implementing the recommendations that were provided to local areas through the TICP process. We are ensuring these linkages, and therefore believe that we are avoiding any unnecessary duplication of efforts or requirements on state and local agencies, by providing a portion (up to 5%) of PSIC funds to states to support their statewide planning efforts related to the requirements of Section 3006 of the Deficit Reduction Act for the PSIC Grant Program. The remainder of the funds will be conditioned on the acceptance of the statewide plans and supporting investment justifications that clearly

map state priorities to uniform planning criteria. All PSIC funding will be awarded by September 30, 2007 as required in the Call Home Act of 2006.

Also keeping with known grant processes, as advocated by many state and local public safety associations, and in order to comply with the deadline set forth in the Call Home Act, PSIC funds will be allocated using a modified version of the DHS FY 2007 risk methodology. Currently DHS and NTIA are working to determine the specific allocation to be distributed to States and local public safety agencies via the State Administrative Agencies in the 56 States and territories.

We are also currently developing the PSIC grant criteria in line with the SAFECOM guidance. The PSIC Grant Program will assist public safety agencies in the acquisition of, deployment of, and training for the use of interoperable communications systems that use or enable interoperability with communications systems that use the reallocated spectrum in the 700 MHz band. Moreover, the Program will assist public safety agencies in exploring the use of all available technologies to advance overall public safety interoperability, so long as those technologies enable interoperability with the 700 MHz band in the future. However, Federal funding is only part of the overall strategy to improve interoperable communication capabilities across the Nation. State and local community leaders are making interoperability a priority and leveraging their resources. Ultimately, solving interoperability is a complex issue that rests on leadership at the State and local level. Leadership through improved governance, dedicated funding, and commitment to working with neighboring jurisdictions will only succeed with sustained support at the local, State, and Federal level.

Although the PSIC funding provides substantial assistance to State and local agencies in addressing and meeting their interoperable communications needs, more work will need to be done. Funding from programs such as the PSIC must work in concert with planning and program management activities at the State and local levels. We will work with our State and local partners to maximize the effectiveness of PSIC funding and continue our assistance to other planning and program management activities.

CONCLUSION
Interoperable communications remains a priority issue for the Administration, for DHS, and for our NTIA partners. DHS remains committed to improving interoperable communications capabilities in every State to ensure that our Nation's first responders have the ability to communicate when the next disaster strikes. In closing, the DHS mission is critical; its responsibilities are great; and its commitment to protecting the citizens of this Nation is unwavering. I will gladly respond now to any questions that you and the Members of the Committee may have. Thank you.