

HOUSE HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS,
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

"PUBLIC SAFETY INTEROPERABLE COMMUNICATIONS GRANTS:
ARE THE DEPARTMENTS OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND
COMMERCE EFFECTIVELY COORDINATING TO MEET OUR
NATION'S EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS NEEDS"

NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT

RAYMOND W. KELLY
COMMISSIONER

TESTIMONY OF
DEPUTY CHIEF CHARLES F. DOWD
COMMANDING OFFICER, NYPD COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION

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Good morning Chairman Cuellar and members of the Committee. I am Deputy Chief Charles Dowd, the Commanding Officer of the New York City Police Department Communications Division. On behalf of Police Commissioner Raymond W. Kelly and Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, I am pleased to be here today to provide you with some areas of concern with regards to The Interoperable Communications Grant Program. Let me begin by commending the House Homeland Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness and Response and the Department of Commerce for your ongoing efforts to address our concerns with regards to the one billion dollar Public Safety Interoperability Grant Program.

New York City has a growing population of more than 8 million residents. Our emergency 911 system received approximately 11 million calls for service in 2006 and dispatched Police, Fire and Medical responders to over 6.4 million 911 calls. Our **CITY'S** population is so large that it exceeds the populations of 39 **STATES**. I mention these figures so you can more clearly understand that any major public safety technology changes have the potential to place an incredible financial burden on the city.

Scored as one of the top tiered cities involving threats of terrorism, New York City has been diligently working on its Interoperable

Communications program since September 11, 2001 and has invested more than \$1 billion in our own public safety infrastructure. This includes a commitment of well over one half billion dollars to upgrade our interoperable voice and data networks.

The City of New York believes that the funding received from this grant should be directly allocated to the local municipalities that understand the needs and technologies that are required for first responders.

Unfortunately under the existing plan the funding will be shifted away from high-risk terrorist targets such as New York City and designated elsewhere. Furthermore, the requirement that funds be distributed to states only ensures that the communications needs of state agencies will be given preference over the needs of local municipal agencies, which are in fact the first responders to all urban emergencies.

Fulfilling the communications needs of public safety first responders should be the goal. In order to fully understand the actual needs for interoperable communication it is crucial that you listen to the first responders that use the technology at these incidents and to avoid, what experience has shown us is the tendency for communications technology to become vendor driven.

We believe our challenge is to look at how we can leverage the power and redundancy of existing (and costly) infrastructures. With prioritization for emergencies and multi network access, we can exploit the potential of these multiple existing networks and their cutting edge technology, for the benefit of public safety communications. We need to avoid “stove pipe” solutions that don’t easily integrate with other systems, have limited capability, are not “future proof”, and have closed standards.

We need to ensure that public safety is afforded the flexibility to explore new technologies such as I.P. (Internet Protocol) for interoperable solutions through existing voice and data public safety networks and commercial systems, as well as cutting edge communications technologies for high rise buildings and subways, both prime terrorist targets.

New York City is currently exploring how to expand its communication systems to include multiple communications layers with the use of both public safety and commercial systems. To attain the highest standard of public safety, it is critical that agencies such as NYPD and FDNY not be restricted in how we use grant funding.

In the mid – 90’s the Federal Communications Commission granted the city the license rights to channel 16, which we utilized to build out a substantial interoperable infrastructure. At the beginning of this grant process the City was faced with the restriction of using grant funding for a 700 MHz system which would have cost hundreds of millions of dollars and been absolutely unnecessary. It is gratifying to note that the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Commerce have taken action to allow interoperable funds to be used for other than 700 MHz solutions. We have and will continue improving our interoperability capabilities with state and federal public safety agencies.

It is the hope of the City of New York that we see continued coordination of effort taking place between the Department of Commerce, the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Communications Commission. Working together will enable every top tiered city to gain the necessary funding and flexibility that is required to build a multi-layered interoperable communication system ultimately allowing first responders to communicate more reliably and save many more lives.

The City of New York’s Public safety agencies are available to discuss this extremely important grant program upon your request. In

conclusion I would like to reiterate the importance of this funding to the City of New York and the need for flexibility in both how it is allocated and spent. Thank you for the opportunity to address these important issues; I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.