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THE SECRETARY OF COMMERCE
Washington, D.C. 20230

May 23, 2007

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

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for sharing your concerns about the manner in which the Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) should administer the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program.

As you note, NTIA is given leeway to support creative, innovative, and timely solutions to advance interoperability. We agree that the PSIC Grant Program affords NTIA a unique opportunity to design a distinctive program for communities to leverage innovative technologies and solutions to improve public safety communications and interoperability. Further, NTIA intends through the PSIC grant program to support a major component of the President's Spectrum Policy Initiative – to promote efficient and effective use of spectrum. As a steward of effective use of this finite public resource, NTIA must consider spectrum efficiency as a priority in evaluating grant applications under this program.

Further, your letter encourages NTIA to fund areas designated as high risk for natural disasters. NTIA recognizes that public safety agencies and their communications systems are overextended during a natural disaster. The failure to interoperate during natural disasters interferes with the safety of first responders and their principal purpose to protect safety of life, health, and property. NTIA is in the process of working with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to evaluate data on a variety of risk factors against what is already captured within the current DHS risk-based formula. It is NTIA's goal to administer the PSIC grant program in a manner that results in improved communications interoperability nationwide.

Lastly, NTIA, in consultation with DHS, intends to design the PSIC Grant Program as a distinct grant program with measurable outcomes and accountability. To achieve this goal, NTIA is in the process of drafting program guidance that will include robust on-site monitoring and detailed grantee reporting requirements in a manner that will enable effective oversight and minimize administrative burdens. NTIA is committed to building the PSIC grant program into an opportunity for meaningful improvement in the state of public safety communications interoperability.

I look forward to continuing to work with you on this very important issue. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact me or Nat Wienecke, Assistant Secretary for Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, at (202) 482-3663.

Sincerely,

Carlos M. Gutierrez

*Hope you are well.
Best wishes*