

**Testimony of John M. R. Kneuer  
Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information  
National Telecommunications and Information Administration  
U.S Department of Commerce  
before the  
Committee on Homeland Security  
U.S. House of Representatives**

**March 14, 2007**

Thank you, Chairman Thompson, Ranking Member King, and Members of the Committee, for inviting me here today to testify about the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and our responsibilities to administer the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program created and funded by the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, Pub. L. No. 109-171, and our coordination with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to implement this program. My name is John Kneuer, and I serve as the Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information and Administrator of NTIA.

NTIA serves as the President's principal adviser on telecommunications and information policy issues, and in this role frequently works with other Executive Branch agencies. NTIA also manages the federal government's use of the radio spectrum. The intersection of telecommunications policy and spectrum management has been the key focus of NTIA, including public safety communications and interoperability issues. Spectrum enables communications for military operations and first responders in support of response and recovery efforts for natural disasters and terrorist attacks. At the same time, spectrum for communications contributes to innovation, job creation, and economic growth. Wireless technologies and services that depend on spectrum provide critical support to federal agency missions that serve the American people, and support to a wide array of commercial and non-federal government applications. These applications provide economic benefits, and protect lives and property.

Additionally, NTIA's Institute for Telecommunication Sciences has been actively involved in the standards-setting process for public safety communications. We have partnered with agencies and programs such as the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Office of Law Enforcement Standards, DHS's Office for Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) and the 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, the National Association of State Emergency Medical Services Directors, the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council, the National Governors Association, and the National League of Cities. Our 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's long-term approach is based on an accelerated, yet structured, process that includes the public safety community to produce a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative statement of requirements for public safety communications (OIC's Public Safety Statement of Requirements), an architecture framework that describes the current and required future states of interoperability (OIC's Public Safety Architecture Framework), and interface standards that define the elements and performance of the interoperability architecture (Project 25 (P25) standards). Short-term, interim solution work is focused on testing and evaluating products and services offered currently to the community to determine if they can enable higher degrees of immediate interoperability effectively and economically. All segments of the NTIA program begin and end with practitioner input and acceptance. NTIA and its federal partners continue to work alongside practitioners to complete the remaining interface standards for P25, the digital narrowband solution that federal departments, such as Homeland Security, Justice and Defense, and many State and local entities have adopted.

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Within a few short weeks of the President signing the Deficit Reduction Act into law, NTIA began leveraging its expertise in the area of public safety interoperable communications and its relationships with the public safety community in order to implement the PSIC Grant Program. The program, which covers public safety agencies in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and four U.S. territories, will assist public safety agencies in the acquisition of, deployment of, or training for the use of interoperable communications systems that can utilize or enable interoperability with reallocated public safety spectrum in the 700 MHz band for radio communication. NTIA does not view this language to limit the grant funds only to 700 MHz systems investments. Rather, NTIA is 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.

The Act directs NTIA, in consultation with DHS, to develop the Grant Program policies, procedures and regulations of the grants to be awarded. As required in the recently enacted Call Home Act of 2006 (Pub. L. No. 109-459), the grants will be awarded by September 30, 2007.

Accordingly, on June 1, 2006, NTIA entered into an agreement with the Department of Treasury to allow NTIA to borrow necessary funds to implement the program as of October 1, 2006. On February 5, 2007, we hired an additional Communication Program Specialist to focus exclusively on the implementation of the PSIC Grant Program.

On February 16, 2007, NTIA and DHS's Office of Grants and Training signed the attached Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to implement the \$1 billion PSIC Grant Program to help state, local and federal first responders better communicate during a natural or man-made disaster. NTIA, in consultation with the Office of Grants and Training, will develop PSIC Grant Program policies, procedures, and regulations to implement the program; will approve final grant awards; and will provide funding to the Office of Grants and Training for administrative costs and the grant awards. The Office of Grants and Training, in cooperation with NTIA, will provide administrative services and its considerable technical expertise to implement the PSIC Grant Program. Consistent with the Deficit Reduction Act, I am the deciding official on PSIC Grant Program guidance and all grant awards.

The PSIC Grant Program will be administered consistently with the *Recommended Federal Grant Guidance: Public Safety Communications and Interoperability Grants, Fiscal Year (FY) 2007* developed by the DHS SAFECOM Program. Grants are to be administered in a manner consistent with urban area Tactical Interoperable Communication Plans, Statewide Interoperable Communications Plans, state and urban areas homeland security strategies, the National Preparedness Goal, and accompanying guidance. NTIA and DHS will utilize existing application, programmatic, and administrative processes and resources to minimize the administrative burden on applicants as well as the non-grant management and administrative costs of the PSIC Grant Program.

The PSIC Grant Program will be designed to complement funds that have been awarded through other grant programs -- such as the Homeland Security Grant Program and the Infrastructure Protection Program -- that include interoperable communications funds. The program guidance and application process will emphasize leveraging grants, contracts or state/local budgets to build and sustain intrastate and interstate regional capabilities and identified needs.

The Program Plan sets forth the schedule of major activities regarding administration of the PSIC Grant Program and the Budget Plan delineates the amount of funds to be transferred between FY 2007 and FY 2011 for specific activities. Grants will be awarded after grant guidance is completed in the third quarter of FY 2007 and grant application information, and eligibility requirements also will be released, at this time.

Over the past year, NTIA has worked closely with DHS to implement this program. In a few weeks, NTIA will participate with SAFECOM and the Office of Grants and Training in a workshop held in partnership with the National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices on *Statewide Planning for Public Safety Communications Interoperability*. In the months ahead, NTIA intends to use its expertise to explore all available technologies that are available to first responders to advance

overall interoperability. We are committed to designing this one-time grant opportunity to achieve a meaningful improvement in the state of public safety communications systems with a minimum of impact to our replacement of existing state, tribal, and local radio communications assets.

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.

Mr. Chairman, once again, I thank you for inviting me here today to speak to you and the Committee. This concludes my remarks and I would be glad to answer any question you or Committee members may have.