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8191 Southpark Lane, Unit 205

Littleton, CO 80120-4641

PH: 303-649-1843

FAX: 303-649-1844

Toll free: 1-866-807-4755

www.NPSTC.org

NPSTC@highlands-group.com

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Contact: Marilyn Ward

866.807.4755

www.npstc.org

NPSTC Executive Director Testifies to Congress on First Responder Telecommunications Needs

(Littleton, Colorado, March 8, 2007)—The Executive Director of the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council (NPSTC) testified before a Congressional Subcommittee today on the impact of the Department of Homeland Security, Science and Technology Directorate (DHS S&T Directorate) on our nation's public safety communications.

In her remarks to the Committee on Science and Technology, House Subcommittee on Technology and Innovation, Ms. Ward addressed the principal communication technological needs of the first responder community, noting that the public safety community is concerned by the considerable reduction in the 2007 budget and that the newly created Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) has been left unfunded. "Funding through agencies transferring portions of their budgets to DHS OEC is time consuming, creates tension among the agencies, and causes confusion and uncertainty for the state and local community," Ms. Ward said.

Through its Executive Committee, Emergency Response Committee, and organizations like NPSTC, SAFECOM is developing a national plan to enhance interoperability. "We believe the focus on new and innovative technology today is found in broadband," Ms. Ward stated. "The challenge is that public safety spectrum is currently not available for a nationwide broadband network that is controlled by and built to public safety standards and requirements."

DHS SAFECOM has pursued development of regional radio systems by soliciting participation using a bottoms-up strategy. Although this takes time, it is a critical element that must be completed. In addition to the tools and critical studies SAFECOM develops, they also test and evaluate technologies, conduct pilot programs, and are funding a compliance lab. None of these have adequate resources.

DHS SAFECOM, with their partners at the National Institute of Standards and Technology, Office of Law Enforcement Standards, and the National Telecommunications and Information Agency Institute for Telecommunication Sciences are currently testing the current public safety standard referred to as P25.

Ms. Ward emphasized that Congress should seriously consider two issues in their discussions. First, fluctuation in funding for communications interoperability deters progress. Three-to-five year funding estimates would provide stability for long-term programs and strategies and would result in considerably more improvements. Second, she said that NPSTC and the public safety community urge serious examination of the proposal to permit the creation of a Public Safety Broadband Trust in 700 MHz and reallocating 30 MHz of spectrum to public safety that is scheduled to be auctioned.

NPSTC is a federation of organizations whose mission is to improve public safety communications and interoperability through collaborative leadership.