

**COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY AND  
INNOVATION**

**Summary of the  
Statement of Marilyn Ward, Executive Director  
National Public Safety Telecommunications Council  
(NPSTC)**

**March 8, 2007**

Chairman Wu, Ranking Member Gingrey, and  
Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council, referred to as “NPSTC,” it is a privilege to appear before the Subcommittee in its examination of the Department of Homeland Security’s research and development activities. We commend the Subcommittee’s work in this area.

NPSTC’s mission is devoted to improving the communications capabilities of local and state public safety agencies. NPSTC was created in 1997 as a volunteer federation of thirteen national public safety associations. Our efforts are focused on the technical capability and capacity of radio communications and the coordination of these resources across all agencies.

The following are just a few examples of our efforts:

NPSTC provides the DHS SAFECOM Program local and state public safety input to its science and technology research, development, and standards efforts.

NPSTC critically examines technical and regulatory implications regarding radio spectrum utilization and management.

NPSTC provides comments to the FCC on critical public safety issues representing over 250,000 public safety responders.

NPSTC provides an open forum for discussion and dispute resolution on public safety communications issues.

My testimony today focuses on the DHS Science and Technology role in furthering public safety communications. 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. 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. The recent testimony of Chief Harlin McEwen, IACP, and Chief Charles Warner, IAFC to the Senate Commerce Committee, is supported by all of the major public safety associations including NPSTC and is attached to my written testimony.

The public safety community is concerned that there was a considerable reduction in the 2007 budget and that the newly created Office of Emergency Communications (OEC) was left unfunded. Agencies transferring portions of their budgets to fund DHS OEC is time consuming, creates tension among the agencies, and causes confusion and uncertainty for the state and local community.

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.

Although not directly involved with the Department's planning and priority mechanisms, we do not see projects and programs based on long-term solutions to the problems we face in communications. The budgets at the federal level fluctuate and are not sustained in a manner that is conducive to long-term solutions.

DHS SAFECOM, along with their partners at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Office of Law Enforcement Standards (OLES) and National Telecommunications and Information Agency (NTIA) Institute for Telecommunication Sciences (ITS) are currently testing the current Public Safety standard commonly referred to as P25. This is especially important because many state and local agencies as well as the

Department of Defense and other federal agencies are using P25 radio equipment.

Through the SAFECOM Program, NPSTC has been involved with NIST/OLES for many years such as in the development and review of the SAFECOM Statement of Requirements (SOR) for public safety communications technology. Another example of our collaboration occurred last month when NPSTC worked with NTIA/ITS in Boulder to develop requirements for broadband technologies. Through this collaboration, the original input of 57 practitioners was expanded to 627 who provided input to the project.

I would also like to ask that this Subcommittee review our comments on the progress made regarding the recommendations of the September 2004 GAO report on interoperability provided in my written testimony.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, there are two issues the Subcommittee and Congress should consider.

First, fluctuations 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.

The second issue we would like you to consider is a 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. We urge members to examine this issue very closely. It would make a positive and important contribution to public safety communications.

Thank you again for the invitation to appear before the Subcommittee.