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Courtesy [Paul Kirby](#), TR Daily

## House Panel Includes \$50M in Funding for Interoperability Grant Program

The House Appropriations Committee's homeland security subcommittee late yesterday approved by voice vote a fiscal year 2011 spending bill for the Department of Homeland Security that includes \$50 million for the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program (IECGP).

The Obama administration – like the Bush administration before it – had proposed eliminating dedicated funding for the IECGP (TRDaily, Feb. 1), but – as they have done in previous years – lawmakers balked. The \$50 million would be the same amount the program has gotten in its first three years – although still way below the \$400 million authorized for the grants in 2007 legislation implementing unfinished recommendations of the 9/11 Commission.

The IECGP funding drew praise from some public safety leaders today, although some noted that the funding is still far below the authorized level. Harlin McEwen, chairman of the Communications & Technology Committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, said his group is happy that lawmakers realized the importance of the funding, adding, "Improving public safety interoperability continues to be a high priority for the public safety community and there in need for sustained funding to upgrade and improve our nation's public safety communications systems."

Yucel Ors, legislative affairs director, for the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials International, said his group welcomes the \$50 million in funding for interoperable grants, adding, "At a time when America's public safety and other first response leaders are working so hard to secure vital spectrum to enable sufficient mission-critical broadband capabilities for now and the future, Congress's action to continue to fund this program is greatly appreciated.

"However, while this amount is consistent with previous years, and we recognize that these are tough economic times, it continues to be far short of the \$400 million authorized by law," Mr., Ors added. "Since its inception, the IECGP program has only received \$50 million a year for the last three years equaling \$150 million total, or \$1.05 billion below full authorization levels. We continue to ask Congress to fully fund this and other existing public safety technology and communications programs in order to allow our nation's public safety communications systems to continue to improve, become more efficient, effective and interoperable, including toward build out of a nationwide interoperable public safety broadband network, as called for in the 9/11 Commission Report."

The \$50 million is a relatively small amount of money for Washington, but Chris Essid, director of the Office of Emergency Communications at DHS, said recently that the money has been used wisely by recipients, including to hire statewide interoperability coordinators (TRDaily, May 18). "We think that it's been a very successful grant program," he said. Without it, he added, "we wouldn't have these governance structures in place, we wouldn't have near the amount of full-time coordinators in place."

The subcommittee bill would provide a total of \$4.2 billion for state and local programs, noted Rep. David Price (D., N.C.), the panel's chairman. Overall the bill would appropriate \$43.89 billion in discretionary spending – which is \$1.1 billion over the FY 2010 level and \$254 million more than requested by the Obama administration.

The State Homeland Security Grant Program would get \$950 million – the same as the current fiscal year and \$100 million less than the administration requested, while the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) would get \$907 million – \$20 million more than FY 2010 but \$193 million less than requested. The subcommittee approved \$840 million for Firefighter Assistance Grants, which is \$30 million more than the current year and \$230 million more than requested.

DHS would get \$908.9 million for infrastructure protection and information security – down \$35 million from the current year and nearly \$3.2 million less than the administration's request. The National Cyber Security Division would get \$380.7 million – about \$16.5 million lower than the current year but \$1.9 million higher than requested. Infrastructure protection would get \$330.3 million – nearly \$17 million less than the current year and \$3.4 million less than requested.