

**Testimony before the United States House Homeland Security Committee**

**Hearing on "Public Safety Communications: Are the needs of our First Responders being met?"**

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Good Morning Chairman King, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Committee. My name is Paul Fitzgerald and I currently serve as the Sheriff of Story County, Iowa and as the First Vice President of the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA). The National Sheriffs' Association represents the 3,083 elected sheriffs across the country and more than 20,000 law enforcement professionals, making us one of the largest law enforcement associations in the nation. I am pleased to have this opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the critical issue of public safety communications and whether our current communication needs are being met.

Public safety communications has been a heavily debated and discussed issue over the last decade, particularly regarding the issue of interoperability among the nation's first responders. Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, there has been a significant need among our nation's first responders to build and implement a robust nationwide public safety interoperable mobile broadband network that will improve our nation's homeland security and provide first responders with new interoperable communications technologies that are urgently needed. It is a need that was recognized and recommended by the 9/11 Commission - and it is the only recommendation from the Commission that has yet to be implemented.

The purpose of this hearing is to examine whether the needs of first responder communications are being met. Mr. Chairman, simply stated, public safety currently lacks the basic ability to interoperably communicate amongst each other. In my county of Story, the local law enforcement, fire, and EMS does have interoperability amongst each other within the county lines. We are the exception in Story County – not the rule. The vast majority of public safety agencies nationwide do not have these capabilities. Furthermore, although local Story County first responders have interoperability, we are still unable to communicate with state law enforcement on the same bandwidth nor are we able to communicate with local first responders in neighboring counties.

There must be a solution to this critical problem – and the NSA strongly believes that the solution lies in the implementation of a nationwide public safety interoperable broadband network.

For us to be successful, we need allocation of the 10MHz of spectrum known as the “D Block” to public safety and sufficient and sustainable funding to implement the network.

Both government and non-government studies have recently shown that public safety will not be able to obtain the necessary bandwidth and speed for our current and future needs based on 10MHz of broadband spectrum alone. The additional 10MHz of spectrum will be combined with the current 10MHz of broadband spectrum that is allocated to public safety to create a 20MHz block of spectrum to build a nationwide public safety interoperable broadband network. It should also be said that the D Block is located directly next to the current 10MHz of broadband spectrum that is currently licensed to public safety.

When built, the new nationwide public safety broadband network will be able to support a wide range of public safety; government; critical infrastructure and consumer applications such as voice, video, and internet services, including:

- transmitting high resolution pictures and building blueprints
- on-the-scene telemedicine services
- emergency vehicle telematics, such as GPS tracking
- incident command and control operations
- two-way video conferencing; video monitoring and broadcast services
- first responder health monitoring equipment
- emergency management programs
- large scale evacuation management
- public alerting and alarm services
- enabling next generation 9-1-1

These capabilities mean: that deputies will be able to receive real-time video on their patrol car laptops from videos within a school in the event of a school shooting, enabling deputies to identify where to quickly and most appropriately respond; that firefighters will be able to download building schematics of a burning building to determine safe points of entry; and the EMTs will be able to transmit patients’ vital signs en route to hospitals – saving time and lives.

While current law mandates that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) auction off the D Block spectrum – an auction that originally failed in 2008 - the NSA, along with numerous public safety; state and local intergovernmental; and industry partners, have urged Congress to swiftly pass legislation allocating the D Block directly to public safety.

Allocating the D Block to public safety enables public safety to know that the network and communication will be there when needed. Commercial networks do not and will not provide the reliability needed for mission critical public safety communications – we cannot agree to an unproven, untested theoretical plan that puts our first responders and citizens in real jeopardy.

Currently, there are two measures in Congress which not only allocate the D Block to public safety, but also provide for the funding necessary to create and implement a nationwide public safety interoperable mobile broadband network: **H.R. 607 - the Broadband for First Responders Act of 2011**, introduced by Chairman King and Ranking Member Thompson in the House; and **S. 28 – the Public Safety Spectrum and Wireless Innovation Act of 2011**, introduced by Senator Rockefeller in the Senate. These two bills take the critical steps necessary to assist the nation's first responders in our homeland security and emergency preparedness efforts.

It is rare, in fact almost unheard of, that law enforcement; fire; EMS; dispatchers; mayors; governors; county commissioners; state legislators all agree on an issue. However, the allocation of the D Block to public safety is that one issue. Moreover, the White House; the Department of Homeland Security; and the Department of Justice have all come out in strong and unified support of D Block allocation to public safety; thus, also recognizing the significant need to create this broadband network.

The time to act is now. The 10-year anniversary of 9/11 is quickly approaching; however, public safety continues to lack the ability to communicate effectively and efficiently amongst each other. Interoperability needs to be coast to coast; border to border; urban, suburban, and rural. The allocation of the D Block to public safety, as well as the allocation of funding needed to build the network, are the significant and necessary steps forward to achieving this goal; obtaining interoperability; and creating a nationwide public safety interoperable mobile broadband network.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to come before you today and discuss the critical issue of whether the current communication needs of public safety are being met. I would also like to thank Chairman King and Ranking Member Thompson for their strong leadership on the issue of D Block allocation and their unwavering support for the nation's first responders. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.