

**Testimony to the  
United States Senate  
Committee on Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs**

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***Ten Years After 9/11:  
Improving Emergency Communications***

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**Introduction:**

Chairman Lieberman, Ranking Member Collins, and distinguished members of the Committee, I would like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony on this important topic.

I am Michael Varney, the Statewide Interoperability Coordinator for the State of Connecticut. In addition, I serve as the Vice Chairman of the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators. During my testimony I will speak as the Connecticut Statewide Interoperability Coordinator as well and representing the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC). I have worked in the emergency services, information technology and communication fields for over 24 years and have served in the capacity as the Connecticut Statewide Interoperability Coordinator for over six years.

Being a local first responder and serving in the capacity as a fire chief and hazardous materials team commander, I can truly appreciate the efforts put towards solving the nationwide interoperability problems, having seen their positive impact directly in the field.

Close to ten years ago since the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 a priority for States has been improving emergency responder communications capabilities. Public safety responders need the ability to have the most accurate, reliable information and be able to communicate directly and instantaneously with their assisting and supporting responders.

We understand that solving this interoperable communications problem is more than a technology problem alone. This problem requires significant efforts in governance, standard operating procedures, training and exercises, and the use of these systems in daily operations.

Public safety communications interoperability takes significant coordination to solve and is being addressed by the creation and use of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators or SWICs.

Through the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Emergency Communications the role of the SWICs and their position has been defined and substantially increased. In each state and territory there is a designated SWIC responsible for a variety of critical planning and coordinating functions, all of which were not coordinated through a specific designated office prior to 2001.

For States to improve communications interoperability, collaboration and participation from relevant emergency response stakeholders is essential. In Connecticut, our Statewide Public Safety Interoperable Communications Committee has representatives from each of the five emergency management and homeland security planning regions within our state, law enforcement, emergency medical services, fire departments and key state and federal response and planning agencies. The abilities and relationships that leveraged by this group have been very successful in our efforts to improve public safety communications interoperability within Connecticut and with our surrounding states.

As the central coordination point for their State's interoperability effort, the SWIC plays a critical role. SWICs are responsible for the implementation of the Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan (SCIP) through collaboration with the emergency response community. These individuals dedicate considerable time towards educating the public safety community on their SCIP and enhancing their statewide governance structures. The SWIC also plays a crucial role in the facilitation of governance, training and exercise, and policy efforts to further interoperability across all disciplines of emergency responders. The SWIC's implementation efforts are guided by the initiatives outlined in the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP) and Statewide Communication Interoperability Plans (SCIP).

Efforts that are currently underway by the nation's SWICs include; the coordination and outreach regarding the 2013 narrow banding mandate, the development of intrastate regional governance, development of standard operation procedures and memorandums of understanding, the development of Interoperable Field Operations Guides at the state, urban area and regional level, for use, wireless broadband planning, and each States Communications Unit Leader Training and Certification programs.

Each of the designated Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) site developed a TIC Plan using a national framework put in place. Connecticut used this framework to continue to create TIC Plans for all of the additional emergency management and homeland security planning regions in our state. This effort was possible because of the Interoperable Emergency Communication Grant Program (IECGP) funding. Since the TICPs have been developed they have been used in the field by local practitioners to successfully plan for and respond to events and emergencies that involve multiple disciplines and jurisdictions. The plans helped successfully provide for communications to several large scale law enforcement and hazardous material incidents, responded to by multiple agencies. In early June when tornados struck southern Massachusetts, the Connecticut fire service was requested and responded with significant assets which were coordinated quickly and efficiently between the two states due the prior planning and exercises made possible through the IECGP funded TIC Plan process.

Goal 2 of the National Emergency Communications Plan (NECP) states that by 2011, 75 percent of non-UASI jurisdictions are able to demonstrate response-level emergency communications within one hour for routine events involving multiple jurisdictions and agencies. This is currently being measured and data collected through the SWICs using assistance and tools developed though DHS Office of Emergency Communications (OEC). The SWICs are implementing the Goal 2 measurement process to be completed later this year, which calls for an assessment of the over 3000 counties in the United States of emergency communications performance and capabilities. This important assessment information will be used to update the SCIPs and prioritize the use of grant funds and assistance from coordinated by the SWICs.

The SWICs serve as members of the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC), which was established in 2010 to assist State and Territory interoperability coordinators with promoting the critical importance of interoperable communications and the sharing of best practices. As a member of the NCSWIC, the SWIC

plays a key role in preparing public safety responders through the development of bottom-up governance structures, standard operating procedures, strategic development and implementation of voice and data technologies, training, exercising, outreach and technology usage. The NCSWIC members enhance the response capabilities of public safety responders through close coordination and collaboration with all levels of government.

As a SWIC I cannot say enough about the excellent support and engagement by the DHS Office of Emergency Communications. Their technical support and coordination activities have proven invaluable to our efforts in Connecticut. Connecticut has developed and updated our Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan, created intrastate governance, provided technical training, and data collection activities with the technical assistance from OEC. OEC has through this process and other outreach activities through SAFECOM and the NCSWIC listened to our concerns and priorities and adapted their programs and deliveries to make them as relevant as possible. Truly providing stakeholder driven products and services.

As I mentioned earlier the IECGP funds such as those used to create TICPs in Connecticut have been critical to the SWICs. IECGP funds have been used by the SWICs for planning, training, narrowbanding and public safety broadband activities, and to establish governance initiatives. The IECGP provides funding for the SWICs to ensure that federally funded projects align to strategic plans, and to implement and report on the NECP Goals, allowing DHS to measure progress in emergency communications capabilities nationwide.

In a survey of SWICs conducted in June we found that over one third of the SWIC positions were funded in whole or part by this grant program. The elimination of the funding of this program and reduction of related homeland security grant programs will have a direct impact on the sustainment of the many programs put in place to increase interoperable communications. We appreciate your committee's ongoing support and commitment to the many Homeland Security Grant Programs, specifically the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grant Program.

In Connecticut as the SWIC, I also help coordinate communications support to emergency responders in a disaster environment. As part of this effort, we are an active member of the FEMA, Region 1 Regional Emergency Communications Coordination Working Group. This group comprised of state, local and federal organizations provides us a forum meet with our peers from New England to network and develop specific plans for the deployment of assets for on scene communications support in the event of a disaster. It also is a forum to let us assess and address the sustainability and interoperability of emergency communications systems at all government levels.

We are aware of the commitment to the development and deployment of a nationwide, interoperable wireless network for public safety the administration has put forward in the President's Wireless Innovation and Infrastructure Initiative and helping prepare the nation's responders for the deployment of broadband. Many of our issues are captured within the Rockefeller-Hutchinson bill (S 911), and we are very appreciative of Senators Lieberman and McCain's leadership and the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee in their work to reallocate the 'D' Block for public safety use. This leadership will ensure successful completion of this very important milestone.

While maintaining their traditional land mobile radio systems, our public safety agencies are increasingly using commercial broadband systems to support their missions. We have been relying on off the shelf broadband systems using laptop computers in vehicles and communication devices such as blackberries and smart phones for remote data communication.

Although the present commercial broadband devices have some functions that go beyond public safety communications devices, they lack the ruggedness, reliability, rapid calling and conferencing, and direct device-to-device connectivity of traditional public safety radio systems and equipment. In other words commercial networks do not provide the public safety control, mission criticality, capacity needed for their mission.

The statewide Interoperability Coordinators believe the creation and support of an interoperable wireless broadband network for public safety is critical for interoperability and to allow first responders to communicate and do their jobs as safely and efficiently as possible. We appreciate your ongoing support to make this nationwide network a reality. The NCSWIC is very appreciative of the initiatives supported by the homeland security and governmental affairs and commerce committee to create a nationwide public safety broadband wireless network.

These initiatives by reallocating 700 MHz D block spectrum to public safety, take advantage of the unique opportunity to dedicate sufficient contiguous spectrum to first responder communications by establish a funding source for construction and operation of the network and address key governance issues necessary to ensure nationwide interoperability. The SWICs in each state working with their established governance groups are uniquely positioned to address wireless broadband planning due to the existing governance and relationships of the key practitioners in the field.

Right now my son and daughter have more capability than my firefighters do responding to emergencies everyday. This is a unique time to solve this problem and create a nationwide public safety wireless broadband network.

We look forward to working with you and your senate colleagues to pass this law to meet public safety's needs for interoperable communications, a key recommendation from the 9/11 Commission Report.

In conclusion I again would like to thank the ongoing tremendous support and activity by your committee to increase interoperable communications throughout the United States. The federal investment to support interoperable communications programs over the past few years will continue to show its value in saving lives and protecting property while our nation's first responders work together to respond to emergencies and disasters in our homeland. Thank you again for this opportunity to testify. I would be pleased to answer your questions.