

WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE THE
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, EMERGING THREATS, AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

July 20, 2004

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony and to be present at this proceeding this morning. My name is William J. Gardner, and I am a life-long resident of Suffolk County, New York. I am the supervisor of the Technical Services Section of the Suffolk County Police Department, the 13th largest Police Department in the country.

I joined the Police Department in 1977 as a Communications Technician. At that time we used five single-site base stations for all Police Communications, including all dispatch and all car-to-car type conversations. We used a single shot of microwave radio, point-to-point over one mile, and had a handful of prehistoric computers within the entire Department. Communications were almost entirely within the Police department, with only a minimal level of interoperability. Fast forward to the year 2004, and the Police (and County) communications system now consists of a twenty-two (22) channel 800 MHz trunked Public Safety radio system with almost 8000 users on it; there are 179 bases stations in that system at eight (8) different radio tower sites. In

addition, we have a Mobile Data Computer system that has over seven hundred (700) computers in sector cars and unmarked cars.

There is a separate infrastructure for that mobile computer system, utilizing thirteen (13) different UHF frequencies at 13 sites. We own and use a digital microwave radio system as a communications backbone to support both of those communications systems; it has a six thousand-channel (6,000) capacity and connects seventeen (17) different sites throughout the County of Suffolk. Since 1993, Suffolk County has invested some \$50,000,000.00 in these systems, most of that through local taxes and bond issue. The Federal Government has contributed some \$15,000,000.00 of that money through COPS MORE grants. Police and Public Safety Communications have come a long way in Suffolk County, but we still have many miles to travel.

As communications systems were expanded within the County, so did the level of interoperability. The trunked radio system now ties together Federal, State, County, town and village agencies. All twenty-three Suffolk County Police Departments can intercommunicate on the trunked system; any one of the 8,000 users can communicate directly with any other radio or user. For regional disasters or mass response situations, there are Law Enforcement ONLY talk groups on the system to help promote and produce a unified structure of command and control. There are countywide talk groups that allow ALL agencies on the system access to every other agency. We also have

the capability of direct communications to Fire Rescue dispatch. The trunked system is available to all public safety entities within Suffolk County, a fairly loose definition that allows all levels of government and governmental agencies to utilize the system if they so desire. No agency is forced to use the system.

Radio communications with our neighbor Nassau County are not nearly as robust nor at all as far-reaching as that within Suffolk County. Only recently have we established a direct radio link to Nassau Police Headquarters.

Without some intermediate intervention, such as that of a Duty Officer or a Watch Commander, there is NO direct radio communication between Suffolk and Nassau Police. A similar circumstance exists with communications between Suffolk and NYPD.

There are many reasons and causes for the lack of interoperability, some are simply explained while others tend to be more complicated and complex. In some cases, jurisdictions simply do not care about interoperability as long as they can intra-communicate, that is the focus of their efforts. Agencies build out systems that they know cannot communicate with other local systems due to frequency, monetary, or operational constraints. I am not saying that any of these decisions are wrong or misguided, but they do not contribute to interoperability.

Suffolk County has received a grant through Congressman Steve Israel for the specific purpose of improving interoperability between Suffolk County Police and the NYPD primarily, and also to help with communications with Nassau County. This grant will allow Suffolk County Police, and other County Police agencies, to utilize the NYMAC (New York Metropolitan Advisory Committee) UHF “interop channels” granted the region by the FCC. This grant request was a direct result of the events of 9/11, where some 200 Police from Suffolk traveled in to NYC only to find a black hole of communications. The officers were out of range of the Suffolk system and could not talk to any NYC officers as we did not have any radios compatible with their system. Should a similar situation arise, utilizing the radios funded by the grant officers will now be able to communicate directly to any of the five city boroughs, and be directed by NYPD to available channels. Additionally, the grant will extend that UHF backbone out into Long Island into both Nassau and Suffolk County. These frequencies will be monitored by Police and allow NYPD officers to utilize their radios in this area, and communicate directly to both PD’s. Finally, this grant will also enhance the coverage the 800 MHz National Channels on the Island and allow for some communications directly with NYPD. We will be extending the backbone of the National Channels to three other locations, one in Nassau and two in Suffolk. NYPD will be provided with radio control stations, which will tie in directly to the National Channels.

New York State participation to this point has been minimal within the Metropolitan area. It is pursuing a statewide wireless system intended to provide connectivity throughout the State for certain State agencies, and provide improved communications to other localities. By connecting to locally owned systems, such as Suffolk County's, it is hoped that a high degree of intercommunications can be achieved. Personally, I have reservations about this from a local perspective, but the general idea of improving interoperability and inter-connectivity is a worthwhile pursuit.

The FCC has also been active locally, through the efforts of Region 8 planning committee (RPUC...Regional Planning and Update Committee). By opening up the 800 MHz spectrum nationally, much needed new spectrum became available in this Region. Suffolk County took full advantage of the spectrum and moved primary radio communications from the crowded, interference-rife VHF spectrum up to the 800 MHz spectrum. However, available spectrum was quickly used up, and there are no frequencies available in this Region to newcomers to the 800 MHz spectrum. Fire Departments within Suffolk County, for example, cannot be accommodated on the County system without additional channelization (i.e., frequencies) to handle the increased volume of radio traffic. This has led to the opening of

the 700 MHz spectrum in the area, and Region 8 is now setting rules and guidelines for its use.

A major component of the FCC's involvement, nationally as well as locally, is the adoption of the "consensus plan" for 'rebanding' users within the 800 MHz spectrum. There is a mix of commercial and public safety users through the operational spectrum there, fully legal and licensed by the FCC. However, we do not mix well and interfere with each other's operations.

Public Safety is a strong advocate of the consensus plan, which will:

separate the usable spectrums of commercial and public safety,

greatly reduce interference,

add more frequencies to the public safety pool,

and make the 800 MHz and 700 MHz spectrums a contiguous spread of public safety ONLY spectrum.

I consider the consensus plan to be an extremely critical component of improving communications period, as well as having the capability of improving interoperability.

I know in my heart, and my experience that we can achieve better and long lasting resolutions to the problems of interoperability. I have been through the Suffolk fires, TWA 800, visits from then-President Clinton, and most recently 9/11. In addition to these very unique events, the US Open golf tournament in June had Federal, State, County, Town, and Village Police

officers involved. In all of these cases, we were able to manage some level of interoperability, but in no case was it ever as good as it could have been. Personally, I think back to the events leading up to and preceding the Y2K problem. We had many meetings, many conferences, brought together all levels of government, exchanged ideas and discussed issues. We identified the problems, identified solutions, and implemented them. Much was made of the alleged “scare tactics” relative to Y2K when nothing of major proportions happened. However, I am convinced that nothing major happened because of the efforts at all levels of government, and we did such a great job that we overcame all obstacles in our path. If we can apply the same dedication and same level of cooperation, we can also overcome the obstacles to full interoperability.

Thank you for your time.

Mrd

Multiple frequencies

Multiple jurisdictions

Federal: Brookhaven Lab, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Seashore and
we have “tenants” from the FAA and the Secret Service.

US Open

Y2K

Clinton

Suffolk Fires

TWA800

9-11

Priny ticket and hotel info

Print doc she sent yesterday

Get all docs from here