

TESTIMONY OF

Chief Harlin R. McEwen

Chairman, Public Safety Spectrum Trust Corporation
Chairman, Communications & Technology Committee
International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)

Before the

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

July 30, 2008

Brooklyn Borough Hall Hearing Room

Public Safety Interoperable Communications and the 700 MHz D Block Proceeding

Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to participate in this Hearing. I have been involved in public safety communications for more than 30 years and now serve as Chairman of the Public Safety Spectrum Trust, the 700 MHz Public Safety Broadband Licensee. Chairman Martin, you and Commissioners Copps, Adelstein, Tate, and McDowell have shown you share our vision for public safety communications capabilities in the 21st Century. You have worked hard to develop an action plan that will take us from a concept to a nationwide broadband interoperable network.

Advances in broadband telecommunications can give emergency responders the ability to monitor vital signs of firefighters on-site, observe patients on their way to emergency rooms, and get criminals off the street with real-time fingerprint scanning. And these are only a few of the almost limitless number of innovative applications that can help public safety officials protect our safety. At the same time, these new capabilities can permit interoperability among first responders that we do not have today and will ensure that we never have to repeat the terrible communications deficiencies that we faced in events like 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina.

I commend the City of New York for putting together the essential ingredients that have permitted it to deploy an advanced broadband network. If New York's access to funding could be replicated throughout the rest of the country, we would be facing a less challenging future. But history has proven that it will take a national effort to create nationwide interoperability. We also know that an approach other than reliance on public financing is the only way to ensure adequate, sustainable funding for a nationwide, broadband public safety-grade network.

Fortunately, this FCC has proposed a paradigm-shattering model, a Public/Private partnership between the D Block licensee and the PSST serving as the Public Safety Broadband Licensee, that will couple the interests of business and public safety. This partnership will permit emergency responders in rural and suburban, as well as metropolitan, areas to take advantage of telecommunications breakthroughs that otherwise would be limited to commercial applications. It will mean that, at last, we will have the communications capabilities and interoperability needed to protect our communities no matter the scale of the disaster.

For a public safety official like me, whose career has been focused on improving emergency responder communications, this partnership promises to deliver the network I have always envisioned. . But this kind of network requires a serious commitment from both a public and private partner if it is to be financed, built, operated, maintained and upgraded over time. It also demands a dose of reality and a considerable amount of flexibility. Both sides – public safety and commercial – will need to commit their best and brightest to the effort. We must be prepared to modify our thinking as we embark together on this entirely new, historic undertaking.

The recent comments filed on the D Block from companies like Sprint Nextel, U.S. Cellular, Ericsson and others are a very promising sign that those who know what is needed to make a wireless network commercially viable believe that the D Block/PSST partnership can succeed. They have proposed some intriguing concepts that deserve further investigation by the FCC. These ideas recognize that our old model for building public safety systems, individually and relying on government funding, will not work for a network of this scale and ambition. The PSST will continue to work with them, with long-standing public safety supporters such as Motorola, Northrop Grumman and Alcatel Lucent, and with others who have a genuine commitment to the Public/Private partnership in exploring creative approaches to this challenging, but absolutely essential, endeavor.

The PSST is working closely with the organizations that come under the umbrella of the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council and others to take a hard look at public safety requirements. A broadband network that doesn't go beyond what is available commercially today, in terms of coverage, capability, and reliability, would be a poor use of public safety's 10 MHz of broadband spectrum. On the other hand, we understand that we need to weigh our vision of an ideal network against the ultimate reality test – that there may be no nationwide interoperable broadband network unless commercial and public safety interests come into alignment. The technical standards the PSST proposed in its last filing represented our best thinking at that time, but we remain open to discussion about the right balance of technical, operational and, yes, economic elements for public safety and for commercial users. We invite a dialogue with those who want to work collaboratively with us in helping the FCC craft rules that provide the certainty needed by commercial and public safety entities to produce a successful D Block auction.

The FCC, the PSST and others who are committed to the success of this partnership have the dedication and the knowledge to make it work. What we do not have is the luxury of time. The D Block spectrum and the FCC's vision of a Public/Private Partnership that delivers interoperable broadband communications for public safety users – and also brings increased broadband capabilities to commercial users throughout the country – is the right idea at the right time. We cannot come this close and let slip away what may be a once in a lifetime opportunity to address the communications requirements of the nation's emergency responders. We urge the Commission to move forward to develop revised rules and to schedule a D Block auction, hopefully before the end of this year.