

PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE TESTIMONY
SENATE COMMUNICATIONS & TECHNOLOGY, LAW & JUSTICE, AND VETERANS'
AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS COMMITTEES

JUNE 7, 2017



PRESENTED BY

MAJOR DIANE M. STACKHOUSE
DIRECTOR, BUREAU OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION SERVICES
PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

Good morning Chairmen Aument, Hughes, McIlhinney, Brewster, Vulokovich and Costa and members of the Senate Communications & Technology, Law & Justice and the Veterans' Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees. I am Major Diane Stackhouse, Director of the Bureau of Communications and Information Services, Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) and Robert Barnham, Director, Statewide Radio Network Division. On behalf of the State Police, I would like to thank you for extending the invitation to us to participate in this discussion concerning PA Statewide Radio Network (PA-STARNet) and also provide an update to the P25 radio system.

In 1996, Governor Tom Ridge signed Act 148 which provided funding for a communication and information infrastructure to form a statewide mobile radio network. Upon signing this Act, the Office of Administration commenced a project to build a statewide public safety radio network. In 2006, the PSP began the process of transitioning from its legacy VHF system to OpenSky. The transition was completed in 2010; however, due to coverage and reliability issues, PSP continued to operate the legacy VHF system in our patrol vehicles as a backup to OpenSky. To date, PSP still operates and maintains two radios. On July 1, 2012, responsibility for PA-STARNet transitioned from the Office of Administration to PSP. An assessment of the strengths and weakness of the system was undertaken. The STARNet Division quickly realized the greatest strength to the system was the microwave network for data communications and the capital investments in towers. These investments made it possible to share towers and microwave bandwidth with counties for public safety and utilize the microwave network for wireless connections to PSP stations and other Commonwealth agency facilities. The Commonwealth owns 173 high profile steel towers for radio communications and 27 counties co-locate antennas on these towers at no cost. PSP monitors the radio and microwave networks via a Network Operations Center, as well as, oversees the maintenance of the towers and associated structures. However, it is the OpenSky, land mobile radio component of STARNet which remains unreliable and continues to suffer from shortcomings; therefore, preventing it from being a true "public safety grade" radio system.

One key concern for any first responder (police, fire, EMS) is interoperability. Lack of interoperability occurs when public safety personnel respond to the same emergency but cannot communicate with each other because they operate on incompatible radio systems or on different frequency bands. Lack of interoperability wastes time, wastes effort, and can risk lives. Safety of life and property can only be assured when public safety agencies can easily communicate with one another. Cumberland is the only county who still uses OpenSky; therefore, we are not interoperable with the majority of county radio systems and surrounding states. The only way we can achieve reliability and interoperability is moving to a P25 open

standard radio technology as defined by the Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) which they established in 1995. APCO mandates national standardized specifications for the manufacturing of radio equipment to enhance interoperability.

PSP is underway with a P25 radio system to replace OpenSky. On October 3, 2016, Motorola Solutions was awarded the P25, Land Mobile Radio contract. Pilot I is operational in Warren County as of April 3rd and Pilot II P25 assessment is scheduled to occur later this year in Venango, Crawford and Erie Counties. PennDot and the Game Commission will be providing PSP with feedback regarding the new system. Statewide deployment is anticipated to commence in the beginning of 2018 in western Pennsylvania and move eastward. A P25 radio system is the future for Pennsylvania.

Within the past few years, PSP has responded to emergency requests for assistance outside our board~~ers~~ in addition to coordinating the manhunt and eventual capture of killer Eric Frein. PSP assisted with the riots in Baltimore, Maryland; a disaster relief mission in New Jersey because of Hurricane Sandy; the PAPAL visit, and the Democratic National Convention. The importance of interoperability with local, state and federal law enforcement is paramount. First responders need to communicate with one another and unfortunately our current system hampers our ability. Troopers and the other 21 state agency employees, which STARNet serves, deserve a public safety grade radio system that not only meets the challenges of Pennsylvania's topology but is also interoperable.