Pennsylvania State Police Testimony
Senate Committee on Technology and
Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness
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Presented by:
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Good morning, Senator Baker, Senator Wonderling, and members of the Committees on Technology and Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness. I am Lt. Colonel Coleman J. McDonough. On behalf of Colonel Jeffrey B. Miller, Commissioner of the Pennsylvania State Police, I want to thank you for the opportunity to talk about our Department's implementation of the Statewide Radio Network (STARNET).

In early 2001, the Pennsylvania State Police began using the 800 MHz STARNET System to provide data connectivity for the State Police Mobile Office. By December 2002, the statewide rollout of the Mobile Office System was completed. Since then, STARNET has been a consistently reliable data transmission platform.

Troopers throughout the Commonwealth use STARNET on a daily basis to make data transactions across 1,012 Mobile Office terminals. During August 2007 alone, State Police personnel performed 261,648 transactions with Mobile Office. Transactions via STARNET do not require any recurring charge from a data service provider, saving the State Police approximately $600,000 each year.

Mobile Office data transactions allow Troopers to check the Commonwealth Law Enforcement Assistance Network, commonly known as CLEAN, for wanted and missing persons, persons who are subject to Amber Alerts and Protection From Abuse Orders, stolen vehicles, and suspended driver's licenses and registrations. All of these checks are made within seconds using STARNET as the data carrier. Our Troopers are also able to obtain PennDOT driver license photographs and transmit the photos into patrol vehicles where they can be used for identification purposes.

STARNET, combined with Mobile Office, significantly enhances our effectiveness as well as officer safety. When an officer queries CLEAN and the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) about a potentially wanted person or stolen vehicle, for example, a positive response is called a "hit." The first Mobile Office "hit" occurred on March 17, 2001. The day after receiving Mobile Office training, a Trooper encountered a disabled motorist on the Capital Beltway in Cumberland County. Using Mobile Office, the Trooper queried CLEAN and learned the motorist was wanted for violating parole in York County. Afterward, the Trooper candidly admitted that he may not have made the query if his patrol vehicle had not been equipped with the Mobile Office.

The second Mobile Office "hit" occurred in Troop J Lancaster's area. A Trooper was trained in Mobile Office on his regular daylight shift. That evening, while on special assignment, he used Mobile Office to identify a motorist who was wanted on aggravated assault charges in Philadelphia.

Another great feature of the STARNET Mobile Office partnership is its text-messaging capability. Mobile Office software is installed on desktop computers in the communications room of every station. This allows our Troopers to communicate with dispatch and each other through text messages. Text messaging comes in handy when dispatchers and Troopers need to communicate information they do not want heard over the radio.

Text messaging also serves as a back-up means of communications should the VHF voice radio system fail for reasons beyond our control. In November 2003, for example, the State Police VHF tower at North Mountain collapsed, leaving Chambersburg and Carlisle Stations without radio communications. Several hours

later, temporary VHF communications were set up at the Chambersburg Station, but Carlisle still did not have any VHF capability. Fortunately, Troopers in the field were still able to communicate via text messages.

Although STARNET is already used for data transmission throughout the state, we are still in the initial stages of deploying STARNET for 800 MHz voice communications and dispatch. STARNET has been fully implemented at ten State Police Stations and five State Police Gaming Enforcement Offices. Stations using 800 MHz radio include the Lancaster and Ephrata Stations in Troop J, the Carlisle Station of Troop H, and all of Troop G, consisting of the Hollidaysburg, Lewistown, Rockview, Philipsburg, Huntingdon, McConnellsburg, and Bedford Stations. Gaming Enforcement Offices using 800 MHz are at Presque Isle in Erie County, Mohegan Sun in Luzerne County, Chester Harrah's in Delaware County, Philadelphia Park in Bucks County, and The Meadows in Washington County. By late next fall, STARNET voice communications should be implemented in 58 stations across the Commonwealth. We expect the system to be fully deployed at all State Police Stations and Gaming Enforcement Offices by 2010.

In the meantime, the Pennsylvania State Police continues to capitalize on the technology offered by the STARNET 800 MHz radio. For instance, on Monday, July 16, 2007, we were able to create a direct link between municipal police cars and State Police helicopters in Cumberland County. For the first time, municipal police officers can ask for assistance by speaking directly to State Police helicopter pilots. In the past, those requests had to be routed through county dispatch or State Police cruisers.

A few weeks after creating that connection, the Carlisle Station went live on

STARNET for all radio communications. Now, Troopers in Cumberland County can speak directly to municipal police officers on patrol as well as the Cumberland County 911 Center. Thanks to STARNET and Cumberland County, Troopers have county dispatch, as well as police east and west frequencies in their cars. Troopers and municipal police can instantly be apprised of criminal activity in progress and public safety needs, and respond in a coordinated manner. As you can imagine, this is quite a force multiplier.

In addition, the State Police now patrol the highways of Philadelphia. Through STARNET, those Troopers have direct access to the Philadelphia Police Department's city-wide dispatch band. This means our Troopers can speak directly to Philadelphia police during emergency situations.

Further, STARNET was used for several major State Police operations in 2007. During the U.S. Open golf tournament in Oakmont, a 100-trooper detail used STARNET for radio communications. STARNET allowed Troopers to communicate by radio with Allegheny County Police and Allegheny County dispatch. Similarly, the State Police used STARNET voice communications for the 2007 Arts Festival in State College as well as the Penn State-Notre Dame football game – which was a highly successful night for everyone except Notre Dame fans, of course.

Finally, the United States Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency has established the National Incident Management System, or NIMS. NIMS sets incident management guidelines for responding to any emergency, including making interoperability of communication systems a priority in emergency planning. STARNET enables the State Police to meet the NIMS guidelines,

which is an important component of preparedness should a catastrophe, such as September 11 or Hurricane Katrina, strike Pennsylvania.

In conclusion, on behalf of Colonel Miller and the Pennsylvania State Police, thank you again for this opportunity to testify before your committees. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.