Pennsylvania State Police Testimony
Senate Committees on Law and Justice, Transportation and
Communications
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Presented by:
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Good morning members of the Committees on Law and Justice, Transportation and Communications. I am Major Scott R. Snyder, acting Deputy Commissioner of Staff for the Pennsylvania State Police. With me today is Captain Adam M. Kisthardt, Dispatch Operations Division Director, Bureau of Communications and Information Services. On behalf of Colonel Frank Noonan, Commissioner of the Pennsylvania State Police, thank you for the opportunity to talk about our Department's implementation and use of the 800 MHz Statewide Radio Network commonly referred to as "PA-STARNet".

In 2006, the Pennsylvania State Police established the Statewide Radio Implementation and Interoperability Office for successful migration of the State Police to the new 800 MHz radio system. Since then, the Department has expended a great deal of resources to complete this migration. For instance, the entire complement of State Troopers have received hands on training in using the radio system, thousands of radios have been programmed and installed in vehicles and stations, and sophisticated user personalities have been developed for each Trooper to insure they have the most appropriate selection of radio Talk Groups. The Pennsylvania State Police has acquired much equipment and supported day-

to-day operations throughout the process. As a result of this work with the new radio, we have learned a great deal about the performance of the system and where the system needs to improve to meet the needs of our agency.

As of December 2010, the Pennsylvania State Police has fully migrated data and voice communications to the PA-STARNet 800 MHz radio system. All State Police stations and personnel use the system for their primary communications. The data system has been successful in allowing the Mobile Office computers in State Police vehicles to have effective communications. These Mobile Office computers allow Troopers to have up to the moment information on incidents, status of fellow Troopers on patrol, access to Commonwealth Law Enforcement Assistance Network (CLEAN) and National Crime Information Center (NCIC) data. All of this information serves citizens well, as it allows Troopers to quickly and intelligently enforce the laws of the Commonwealth and identify persons who are missing, wanted, or endangered. Last year Troopers made 4,099,576 CLEAN and NCIC inquiries using the Mobile Office system. This represents a 21% increase over 2009, an indication that more checks are being made to see if persons are missing, endangered, or wanted.

The voice component of PA-STARNet has provided the Pennsylvania State Police with several distinct advantages. The ability to speak over long distances has allowed the Department's watch center to develop accurate first hand information as to the status of public safety incidents in the Commonwealth. It has also allowed the Pennsylvania State Police to monitor from its Dispatch Centers, all Pennsylvania State Police priority button activations on the radio system statewide. The radio allows our Department to use mapping functions to know where the activations are occurring. The large amount of talk groups available to our Department have helped with previously overcrowded voice traffic issues. The system has also worked well during large Department task force operations. The Pennsylvania State Police appreciates the "global" user profiles that the Office of Administration, Office of Public Safety Radio Services (OA-OPRS) has created that allow all Commonwealth agencies and task forces to have common PA-STARNET radio talk groups. We have used global profiles during large-scale operations and have enjoyed success with them. The radio supplied by the Commonwealth to each county 911 center has provided a much-needed springboard for interoperability. This has allowed the establishment of a county talk group permitting interoperability between Troopers and specific 911 centers in an emergency. There are many

recognized benefits of the PA-STARNet system for the Pennsylvania State Police. The Pennsylvania State Police appreciates all the hard work and efforts of OA-OPRS in bringing us PA-STARNet.

As with any new system, especially a complex technology system, there are areas in need of improvement. The PSP has been working with the OA to improve the quality of our statewide radio network. Specifically, we continue to enhance the reliability of the system to address the issue of outages in the PA-STARNet system. From time to time, there have been outages. The PSP has been fortunate because it has retained its former VHF radio system as a back up and that system has helped during these occasions. The Department will eventually lose that VHF system which currently serves as a backup safety net, as a result of FCC narrow banding requirements that take effect on January 1, 2013. We will need to take into consideration the deadline to decommission the VHF radio system as we make improvements to the STARNet system.

The Pennsylvania State Police has also been working on advancing the quality of the system's coverage over the various terrains throughout the Commonwealth. We have encountered areas where radio coverage

improvement is needed. The Pennsylvania State Police has worked with OA OPRS to resolve these coverage issues and over time, progress has been made. The Pennsylvania State Police needs OA OPRS to continue its work to address coverage issues for the Department to insure Troopers have the radio coverage needed to perform their primary functions and serve the citizens of the Commonwealth.

Another issue of concern the agency is addressing relates to inconsistent aircraft communications. To address this issue our Department has worked with OA OPRS and the vendor to develop a pilot program to improve aviation radio performance. This pilot program should begin this spring and hopefully will lead to a comprehensive solution for the Pennsylvania State Police aviation communication needs. This is important as State Police aviation serves not only the Pennsylvania State Police, but also all municipal and Federal law enforcement and public safety agencies in the Commonwealth.

Working with municipal and Federal law enforcement partners necessitates good communications interoperability. As stated earlier, PEMA and OA OPRS wisely provided each 911 center a PA-STARNet radio

console, which has allowed direct communication from the cruiser to the 911 center in an emergency. However, State Police interoperability is a complex matter that requires further work be done. Under the old VHF radio system, the Pennsylvania State Police had a large amount of shared frequencies with county law enforcement partners and could quickly interoperate without any "patching" or intervention from 911 centers or State Police dispatch centers. The Pennsylvania State Police needs standing or "ready-to-go" interoperability solutions with its public safety partners. The intricacy and proprietary nature of modern digital radio systems has made interoperability very complex. The Pennsylvania State Police has worked with OA OPRS and their interoperability coordinators on several local solutions. Working with our public safety partners from Cumberland County 911, Dauphin County 911, Allentown City Police Department, Lancaster County 911, Westmoreland County 911, Philadelphia City Police, and the New Jersey State Police, we have developed good interoperability solutions. Although, more work is still needed to bring us to the level we were at before the advent of digital and diverse radio systems. We need similar solutions statewide. We request the OA OPRS interoperability unit continue their good work, and for the Commonwealth to

continue providing the resources needed to achieve these interoperability connections.

The need for interoperability brings up another area of concern for the Pennsylvania State Police related to the mobile radio equipment. Currently Troopers can reliably monitor or "scan" only two talk groups. We would like to increase the number of talk groups that may be scanned, as Troopers must monitor different PSP stations, as well as their local county interoperability talk group, aviation patrol talk groups, and other operational talk groups. The Pennsylvania State Police has requested the vendor to provide more radio scanning for interoperability and has been informed this will necessitate purchasing new mobile radios. The expansion of talk groups is an area we continue to explore and hope to expand in the future.

As the Pennsylvania State Police and OA OPRS work together to fine tune the PA-STARNet system, smaller issues crop up as well and require resolution. The Pennsylvania State Police knows its business requirements for this new system and is reliant upon OA OPRS to help resolve these issues. We greatly appreciate the sincere interest and the great support received from the legislature as the Pennsylvania State Police migrates to this new system. While there are issues of concern to us, the Pennsylvania

State Police is committed to insure the system fully satisfies the needs of the Trooper on patrol and will continue to work closely with OA OPRS to resolve the issues.

In conclusion, on behalf of all the men and women of the Pennsylvania State Police, thank you for your support and the opportunity to testify before your committees. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.