



APCO International

Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials-International, Inc.

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July 24, 2009

Lawrence E. Strickling
Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information
U.S. Department of Commerce / NTIA
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Assistant Secretary Strickling:

On behalf of the Board of Officers and membership of the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International I write to call your attention to the need for immediate and ongoing support of public safety communications efforts. APCO International is the world's largest organization dedicated to public safety communications. More than 15,000 members rely on APCO for their professional needs - from examining standards and technologies to providing education, products and services.

It is estimated that there are over 6,000 public safety communications centers serving more than 3,000 counties and parishes throughout the country and answering more than 200 million calls for emergency service each year. The people making these calls view this service as a completely seamless operation, unaware of the thousands of people, the complicated networks, and the technological struggles that are involved in each and every call. These vital services are diligently delivered by the myriad professionals across our country, who work tirelessly to ensure the safety of the public.

Broadband technologies are an ever increasing and crucial component to service delivery for public safety agencies. As existing applications expand and new capabilities become available, public safety use of, and dependence on, broadband will continue to increase. NTIA's steadfast support of these efforts will be key as the future of public safety communications unfolds.

While the provision of funding for broadband deployment as outlined in the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) is admirable, we were disappointed to note that the recently released guidelines do not include provisions for grants specifically targeted at public safety broadband programs.

We have received comments and questions from APCO members regarding support for public safety broadband deployment and the need to better enable BTOF to fund public safety-focused projects. Understanding the need to support these agencies, and in response to our members' inquiries, we encourage NTIA - for the coming rounds of BTOF funding - to state explicitly in its guidelines that projects focused specifically on improving and increasing use of broadband by public safety agencies are appropriate and desired activities for funding. The initial Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) includes no consideration of a public safety broadband project as a stand-alone effort – a valid focal point for funding - and effectively limits infrastructure projects to those focused on unserved or underserved areas.

Public safety efforts of all types create safe communities all across America. A safe community is a thriving community. As study after study shows, safe communities support and enhance economic development, thereby making broadband deployment for public safety a clear avenue for effective application of federal stimulus dollars.

We urge you to issue amended guidelines as the next round of BTOF funding moves forward and prepare to receive applications specifically for the deployment of broadband services to public safety. The NTIA should consider public safety communications essential to economic development and interpret its grant making authority as a mandate from Congress that public safety communications is a high priority for the NTIA and the country.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We offer our expertise and assistance to you as you consider ways to utilize this authority to help make our communities safer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris Fischer". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Chris Fischer
President