

August 3, 2006

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary, Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC

The Honorable Alberto Gonzales
Attorney General
Washington, DC

The Honorable Michael Leavitt
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
Washington, DC

Dear Sirs:

As organizations concerned with emergency response and communications we would like to recognize your important and influential work in this area. Your leadership has brought far more focus on the need to arm state and local emergency response agencies with the most modern tools, and to ensure full interoperability among them. You are not only helping define the emergency communications problems, but are helping deliver possible solutions.

We strongly encourage you to ensure that in Congressional legislation and policies of the Departments of Homeland Security, Justice and other relevant agencies, emergency communications systems and “interoperability” are defined to include inter-organizational data communications, and data communications generally, not just the traditional (and critical) first responder voice radio communications. Similarly, the local, regional and state emergency communications planning and implementation required by current federal guidelines should be done as an integrated whole, including all organizations involved with emergency response, and all forms of communications. First responder radio communications are terribly important; they will be enhanced and enriched by addressing emergency communications as a broad seamless whole.

As Hurricane Katrina and countless other day-to-day and mass emergencies have demonstrated, proper protection of the public requires seamless systems including all forms of communications and information technology, tying together all of the emergency response community, reliably and redundantly. We are concerned that too narrow planning processes and too narrow legal and practical definitions of “interoperability” are compromising our nation’s ability to improve rapidly our response capabilities. Data and information technology are critical, whether supporting emergency alerts to agencies and the public, shared systems for incident management and situational awareness, patient tracking

applications, resource management, syndromic surveillance for bio-terrorism, intelligence fusion, or scores of other uses.

We strongly support the definition of interoperability presented in S.1725, recently passed by the Senate Homeland Security Committee. It reads,

“‘interoperable communications’ and ‘communications interoperability’ mean the ability of emergency response providers and relevant Federal, State, and local government agencies to communicate with each other as necessary, utilizing information technology systems and radio communications systems, and to exchange voice, data, or video with one another on demand, in real time, as necessary.”

This is an excellent definition and targets all the main points of emergency communications interoperability: voice and data, inter-personal and inter-organizational. However, it does not require inclusive coordinated planning, and the funding section of the legislation only allows acquisition funds to be spent on “*equipment*” – i.e. radio systems. These limiting restrictions occur as well in other legislation, policy guidelines and speeches by important government leaders. All of these perpetuate legally and/or practically, the traditional, narrow view of interoperability – and solutions to it. Indeed, unless Congress makes its intent crystal clear, we are concerned that due to the momentum of tradition, local and state officials may continue to treat voice communications as the only emergency responder emergency communications issue and neglect the importance of interorganizational data in emergency communications, including the enrichment of radio voice communications with mobile staff in the field.

We encourage you to specifically require in Departmental policies and state in your public remarks that all organizations materially involved in emergency preparation and response need to participate in planning, deployment, and use of integrated, multi-mode emergency communications systems, that such systems be designed to communicate voice and data between emergency and emergency support organizations, in addition to radio communications with mobile staff, and further that funds be allowed to be spent on software and emergency services information technology, and training, in addition to just “*equipment*” and planning for it.

Once again, we deeply appreciate your leadership and stand ready to do whatever we can to support you.

Sincerely,

Emergency Response Organizations

American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP)

American Disaster Reserve

American Public Health Association (APHA)

American Systems Association of Air Medical Services (AAMS)
Brain Trauma Foundation (BTF)
COMCARE
Emergency Management Association of Texas (EMAT)
Emergency Nurses Association (ENA)
International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM)
Kristin Brooks Hope Center
National Association of EMTs (NAEMT)
National Association of EMS Physicians (NAEMSP)
National Association of State EMS Officials (NASEMSO)
National Emergency Number Association (NENA)
National Mental Health Association (NMHA)
National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC)
Orthopaedic Trauma Association (OTA)
State and Local Health Informatics Consortium, Inc (SLHIC)
Chicago Heights (IL) Fire Department
Nashville (TN) 9-1-1
Spartanburg County (SC) Office of Emergency Services
Tennessee State Emergency Communications Board

Technology Associations

Alliance for Public Technology
CTIA-The Wireless Association®
Emergency Information Infrastructure Project (EIIP)
Emergency Interoperability Consortium (EIC)
Government Electronics & Information Technology Association (GEIA)
Information Technology Association of America
Integrated Justice Information Systems (IJIS) Institute
Network Centric Operations Industry Consortium (NCOIC)

Private Sector

Aegis Assessments, Inc.
Amcom Software
ATS Public Safety
ATX Group
Buffalo Computer Graphics
Cingular Wireless
Citilabs, Inc.
CompassCom Software Corporation
DaProSystems, Inc.
Deloitte & Touche
EastBanc Technologies
eCorridor
Hunter Research, Inc.

Information Builders, Inc.
Intergraph
Intrado
National Center for Crisis and Continuity Coordination (NC4)
Network Designs, Inc.
OnStar Corporation
PatienTrak
Perennial Strategy Group
Proxicom Corporation
Roaming Messenger
Safe Environment Engineering
SpectraCom Corporation
STERIS
Stroom Communications
Syscon Justice Systems Ltd.
Telecommunication Systems, Inc. (TCS)
Tritech Software Systems
Vayusphere, Inc
VisionAIR
Warning Systems Inc.
Ygomi LLC