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leadership,
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and service.



Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International

THE PRESIDENT 2007 BUDGET LACKS ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR DEDICATED FIRST RESPONDER INTEROPERABLE COMMUNICATION GRANTS PROGRAMS

The Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International is the nation's oldest and largest public safety communications association made up of more than 15,000 members representing emergency communications managers, dispatchers, call takers, and technical staff in all 50 states. For more than 70 years, APCO International has been educating our members and the general public on the need to be prepared for disasters of any size - from a fire that engulfs one family home; to a natural or manmade disaster that kills thousands.

Shortly after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Administration and Congress appropriated billions of dollars to aid in the recovery. However, four years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and six months after the largest natural disasters to ever strike our nation, APCO International is very disappointed that the Administration is reluctant to budget the amount needed to improve the ability of first responders to effectively communicate and respond to catastrophic events.

The President's 2007 Budget for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) states, "In the event of a national emergency, it is crucial that first responders, State and local governments, and the Federal Government are able to communicate with each other." The President's budget also states, "over the last three years Federal agencies—mainly DHS—have provided over \$2 billion in grants for interoperability." However, the President's Budget has only a modest increase of \$3.5 million for the Office of Interoperability and Compatibility (OIC) in FY 2007, from \$26.2 million to \$29.7 million which falls short of the actual money needed to improve local, State and Federal interoperable emergency communications systems.

In addition, the President's budget states, "in 2007, DHS will set basic interoperability standards so that Federal grant dollars can be better used to ensure

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that our Nation's first responders can communicate in an emergency." The budget mandates, "every region participating in the 2006 and 2007 Urban Area Security Initiative will be required to develop and implement a plan for emergency incident-level interoperability." For 2007, States will be required to develop an interoperable communications strategy as a condition for receiving DHS homeland security grants.

APCO International has worked closely with the SAFECOM Program within the OIC which is charged with assisting states and localities with improving the emergency radio communication systems of first responders. With less than seven full time employees, SAFECOM Program has been given the formidable task of implementing this critical undertaking. Again, APCO International is disappointed that this critical program for improving the nation's interoperable communications systems continues to be severely under funded.

APCO International is also concerned that there is no dedicated grant program for improving first responder interoperable communications in the President's 2007 budget. The President's 2007 budget only provides \$838 million for Urban Area Security Initiative Grants "to provide grant funding for those metropolitan regions most at risk of a terrorist attack based on their concentrations of citizens, key assets, and potential threats." In addition the President's budget provides an additional \$663 million for flexible DHS grants to states. The money in these grant programs can and will be used by states and regions for initiatives other than improving interoperable communications. Without a clear dedicated budget line for a DHS interoperable communications grant program, it is very unlikely that the money will go to where it is needed the most.

At the same time the President's budget eliminates funding for Community Oriented Policing Service (COPS) Interoperable Communications Grant program that is charged with awarding technology grants to law enforcement agencies for the purpose of enhancing interoperability and information sharing. One such award had gone to the City of New Orleans. The grant is to be used provide the basis for improving day-to-day operability within each parish and improve interoperability within the region. Within 16 months of the completion of the project, the City of New Orleans was struck by Hurricane Katrina. In 2005, after having its budget reduced from \$93 million to \$10 million, the COPS program awarded 26 local law enforcement agencies with interoperable communication grants. Even though this program continues to be effective in providing vital interoperable communications grants, the Administration is proposing to eliminate the program in its entirety because it believes it to be duplicative of DHS grants. However, by eliminating the program, the money that would have gone to COPS interoperability grants is not adequately replaced by dedicated funding for interoperability grants within DHS.

Many local communities who are facing considerable economic hardships do not have the resources needed to ensure their emergency communications systems

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are able to survive and sustain operations during and after a natural or manmade disaster. No one knows where and when the next disaster will occur, but one thing is for certain. There are many small local jurisdictions that do not have the resources they need to ensure their system are able to survive. These local communities need the help of the Federal government to assist them in ensuring their emergency communications are cable of survivability, sustainability, and interoperability.

APCO International urges the Administration and Congress to increase funding for emergency interoperable communications in 2007 by:

1. Increasing direct funding for the SAFECOM Program under OIC.
2. Providing \$100 million for the COPS Interoperability Communications Equipment grant program.
3. Providing \$1 billion in DHS emergency communications grants to local government to:
 - Allow diversity and redundancy of critical circuits serving public safety and emergency operations telecommunication efforts; to include “mirroring” of telephone central offices, which serve as tandems for 9-1-1 service.
 - Provide Telecommunications Service Priority (TSP) to all identified critical circuits within the next 12 months.
 - Develop appropriate back-up capability with initial and on-going planning, implementation and training for the deployment of back-up services, based on risk and need throughout the county.
 - Set requirements for total and nonproprietary interoperability capability for all public safety radio systems and equipment.
 - Expand Emergency Management and Public Safety Communications Mutual Aid agreements to facilitate trained, public safety communications professionals to work in adjoining states during any disaster or locally defined crisis event.
 - Define applicable standards for equipment, operational capacity and future needs to maximize the potential capability and reduce risk of failure.
 - Develop appropriate support services and networks designed to address the immediate and critical human needs of dispatch center staff to include immediate access to supply stockpiles.
 - Develop appropriate support services and networks to ensure that emergency dispatch relief staff can be authorized and deployed quickly and effectively.

There are solutions and remedies to improving emergency communications during natural and manmade disasters. However, costs associated with these solutions are enormous for local governments to sustain alone. It is clearly time to provide focused grant programs for emergency communication needs independent

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of any other funding efforts. These funds should be earmarked for the purpose of developing continuity of operations planning, creating appropriate redundancy and diversity to facilitate sustained services amidst disaster, improving the critical component of training, development of policies and procedures, and conducting regular exercise of the system(s) requirements.

The federal government must step up to the plate and assist local governments in ensuring their emergency communications are able to survive and sustain services after such large scale disasters as Hurricane Katrina.. It is APCO International's position that local governments, which have successful radio systems, should not bear the burden of responsibility for "interconnecting" with a state or federal systems, but rather state and federal systems should focus on how they can interconnect with local systems.

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