



Office of Consumer Counsel to Participate in Application of Federal Grant

The Office of Consumer Counsel (OCC) will be a principal drafter and negotiator of a grant application on behalf of Public Safety and Homeland Security due later this year. The grant is for “FirstNet” federal funding for public safety communications interoperability.

On February 22, 2012, President Obama signed into law a bill that included funding for “Public Safety Communications and Electromagnetic Spectrum Auctions.”¹ The bill included provisions to fund and govern a Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN). Central among the public safety broadband projects already in progress in Connecticut is a focus on Public Safety Interoperability Communications.² The state’s Broadband Policy Coordinator, a Principal Attorney on OCC’s staff, has partnered with Michael Varney, Connecticut’s Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC), housed in the state’s Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection, to file for federal funds later this year.

While the overall federal budget for this national project is over \$7 billion, the states will be eligible for funding of over \$135 million to assist state and local governments in planning for a single, nationwide interoperable public safety broadband network based on a single, national network architecture. This will become the new “First Responder Network Authority” (FirstNet), an independent authority within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA).

This federal program is designed to enable first responders to communicate with each other through a new process that will certainly change the state's preparedness considerably and has obvious budget ramifications since federal funds will cover most of the investment. It appears that \$5 million in direct payments to the state is possible (depending on the financial

¹ Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the 9/11 Commission recommended the establishment of a nationwide, interoperable public safety communications network to resolve communications challenges faced by emergency responders. For the past decade, public safety worked with State and local government officials, the Federal government, and Members of Congress to amass support for a nationwide network.

² To provide immediate and coordinated assistance, the state’s public safety workers must be able to communicate with each other in the mobile radio communication environment effectively, swiftly and securely. “Interoperability” simply refers to the ability of public safety personnel, including utility employees, to communicate by radio with staff from other agencies, on demand and in real time. Public safety agencies require three distinct types of interoperability — day-today, mutual aid, and task force. **Day-to-day interoperability** involves coordination during routine public safety operations. Interoperability is required, for example, when firefighters from around a county join forces to battle a structural fire or when neighboring law enforcement agencies must work together during a vehicular chase. **Mutual aid interoperability** involves a joint and immediate response to catastrophic accidents or natural disasters and requires tactical communications among numerous groups of public safety personnel. **Task force interoperability** involves local, state and federal agencies coming together for an extended period of time to address a public safety problem.



results of a federal auction of wireless spectrum to be held presently), with indirect payments in kind (capital assets such as emergency equipment) of more millions of dollars.

OCC's state Broadband Policy Coordinator already manages a NTIA broadband grant program (detailed in the next section, below) and thus has the experience needed to successfully obtain federal funding by guiding the state's application and negotiation process in concert with state public safety and homeland security officials.

The state Broadband Policy Coordinator was involved in the initial structuring of a successful 2010 BTOP grant to the Connecticut Department of Information Technology (DOIT), now the Bureau of Enterprise Systems and Technology (BEST) within the Department of Administrative Services.³ That grant is proceeding apace and will result in the full establishment of the Connecticut Public Safety Services Data Network (CPSSDN) base fiber optic network topology and inter-connecting the existing 107 PSAPs, the Department of Public Safety building in Middletown, and the state's central IT data center. The project will ultimately implement additional coverage and capacity of the CPSSDN, expanding coverage to an additional 411 public safety-related locations so as to realize cost savings, connectivity requirements, and efficiency improvements.

This project will greatly enhance agency interoperability capabilities, data sharing and overall communications while improving constituent services and safety. The completion of the CPSSDN will substantially increase broadband connectivity and provide service access to over 25,000 police officers, firefighters and supporting staff members.

³ In 2005, the Connecticut General Assembly passed and Governor Rell signed into law Public Act 05-181 which enabled the Office of Statewide Emergency Telecommunications (OSET) to initiate a planning process for the investigation and requirements determination of an integrated safety data network. Surveys of current systems and needs led to the initiation of a feasibility study in 2006. The study included recommendations for network infrastructure solutions that would establish a new, integrated public safety data network, saving affected agencies substantial sustainable costs.