

National Association of State EMS Officials

2009 Annual Meeting

Remarks by Rear Admiral (ret.) James Arden Barnett, Jr.
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Federal Communications Commission

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Good morning, it's nice to be with you. I appreciate the friendly and thoughtful introduction, Kevin (McGinnis). Kevin reflects the dedication and competence of all of you. We at the FCC have been fortunate that he is so tireless in representing your needs in public safety communications. My thanks also to President Steve Blessing and President-elect Shawn Rogers for this opportunity to speak with you.

On behalf of FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski, the Commissioners and the staff of the Federal Communications Commission including, the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, we commend your critical role in responding to citizens confronted with medical emergencies. Whether it is a child suffering an asthma attack who cannot breathe, a man suffering a heart attack who cannot move, or a teenager who must be extricated from an automobile, you are who they look to in their emergency. The Commission knows very well that it is your work we support.

Chairman Genachowski recognizes the faithful service that you provide to the American public on a 24/7 basis and is fully committed to supporting the public safety community. Under his

leadership, he is directing the Commission in two critical and converging areas, the objective of which is to enhance your communications ability.

The first is implementing Congress' direction to the Commission to develop a nationwide broadband plan. Earlier this year President Obama signed the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009 (Recovery Act), which charges the FCC with developing a National Broadband Plan by February 17, 2010. The Recovery Act states that the National Broadband Plan shall seek to ensure all people of the U.S. have access to broadband capability and shall establish benchmarks for meeting that goal. Public safety communications, particularly emergency medical response, must be able to capture the benefits that broadband communications presents.

The second is ensuring that the FCC, specifically, the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau, best serve the American people in times of emergencies. Chairman Genachowski earlier this month released a comprehensive report on the Commission's ability to respond to natural disasters, terrorist attacks and public health emergencies. The report outlines steps that the FCC has and will take to better support public safety communications. In

context of FCC preparedness, Dr. Michael Handrigan's remarks concerning the emergency medical and public health challenges our nation faces, particularly in response to the evolving H1N1 pandemic, are particularly timely and we will gain from his insight.

As Kevin noted, I am the Chief of the FCC's Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau and am responsible for assisting the Chairman and Commission in these efforts. The Bureau consists of over 100 dedicated professionals who carry out the FCC's public safety mission. On behalf of the Commission, we authorize and oversee your wireless communications. The Bureau is also responsible for the Commission's policy analysis leading to the rules established by the Commission involving public safety communications. Along with our licensing and policy responsibilities, we commit significant resources to outreach and planning teams. Our mission is to ensure reliable and modern communications for first responders.

Our role is served by joining your discussion to improve life-saving services in your communities. The ability to call 9-1-1 and receive timely and expert medical care is something, quite frankly, that many take for granted. Successful intake and resolution of a 9-1-1 call involves many complicated, moving parts. As part of

the Broadband initiative and our internal efforts to sharpen our preparedness and our daily operations, the FCC is committed to working with NASEMSO and others to develop and implement practical solutions that assist you in performing your critical responsibilities.

The evolution of broadband makes transmitting information to improve emergency response possible. America's communications sector has undergone significant changes in recent years, and will continue to evolve at a fast pace, and we have to make sure that the advances benefit emergency medical services and all public safety first responders.

Abraham Lincoln once said "The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise to the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew." While we have come far in a relatively short amount of time, we have much more to do to prepare for and adapt to these advances in technologies. We must confront how to provide access to all agencies. We must promote communication across agencies and jurisdictions. We must secure networks and improve the overall quality and capacity of public safety communications. We must focus on cyber security issues and the survivability and security of

commercial communications upon which public safety entities rely.

These challenges fit squarely within the FCC's priority of developing a National Broadband Plan. As you know, broadband technology is particularly critical to the public safety community because it can provide enhanced situational awareness for first responders by establishing the foundation for the transmission of voice, data, or video to 9-1-1 Centers, paramedics and EMS technicians and hospitals in response to emergency calls.

In particular, broadband technology brings greater opportunities for paramedics to assess a patient's condition on-scene and share vital information and tests results so that action can be taken sooner and the patient transported to the most appropriate facility faster. It also better prepares hospital emergency department staff for the incoming trauma case.

Through broadband, sharing patient medical information, providing updates on medical resources, and transmitting findings and trends with emergency managers, health care providers, and public health officials can be done better and faster. Broadband offers additional potential benefits for emergency medical

responders by allowing them to retrieve patient records if and when a patient is unable to communicate.

Many broadband applications are already a reality in a few parts of the country. However, they will only become a reality for the nation as a whole if broadband capabilities become more widely available to commercial and public safety users.

As part of its work on the Nationwide Broadband Plan, the FCC has held 25 public workshops to promote an open dialogue on matters important to the National Broadband Plan.

The Bureau is working now on our next broadband workshop which will focus on Cyber Security and will be held in Washington, DC on Wednesday, September 30 from 9:00 AM to 12:30 PM. We invite you to participate in this workshop by attending in person or watching via the web.

The FCC has sought and received public comment on its Notice of Inquiry on developing the National Broadband Plan. We value the input received to date, but, frankly, need more input from the public safety community—including all of you here today—on what your needs are and how you think broadband

could help you do your jobs more effectively. I encourage you to visit www.broadband.gov and consider participating in this important proceeding.

The Commission's work on a National Broadband Plan is linked to the ongoing 700 MHz proceeding, which is designed to provide a regulatory framework for the creation of a nationwide, interoperable, broadband communications network for public safety. As a result of the digital television transition which occurred in June of this year, public safety now has access to a portion of the 700 MHz band. Most immediately, this allows for deployment of public safety narrowband systems. In addition, the Commission remains focused on the goal of developing a nationwide interoperable broadband network for public safety in the 700 MHz band.

This proceeding is a high priority for the FCC. We continue to examine options to ensure that we move forward with an approach that best serves the American public, and particularly the public safety community. The 700 MHz broadband proceeding will be coordinated with the National Broadband Plan the Commission is crafting.

Health Care

Health Care issues also impact public safety communications. For example, we are examining the potential for communications network congestion should we see a dramatic increase in absenteeism—some experts say up to 40%—due to a severe pandemic.

The increased load on the public switched telephone network (PSTN) and Internet is projected to be significant. The effect this may have on the ability of government, emergency responders, hospitals and public health officials to transfer and share critical, time-sensitive data regarding patient care and medical resources is an open question.

In response to these needs, the FCC has created a \$417 million Rural Health Care Pilot Program that supports 65 nationwide telehealth projects that will connect over 6,000 health care providers to broadband networks in 42 states and three U.S. territories. Nearly 20 of these projects have been approved to begin construction and dozens more are in the works.

As part of the pilot program, the FCC requires qualified participants to coordinate with the U.S. Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention (CDC) and other public health officials in instances of national or regional public health emergencies, such as bioterrorism events, disease-related outbreaks, or pandemics, and provide them with access to these broadband networks.

By providing public health officials this access, we expect to improve access to quality care, increase efficiency and information-sharing in health care delivery, decrease medical errors, and lower costs for consumers. You will begin seeing some of these networks in use within the next two years.

Emergency Access to Networks and Commercial Mobile Alerts

Another important issue we are focusing on is network access, especially as it relates to public safety communications. It is very important for first responders to be able to communicate in times of crisis, and the federal government has several priority services to address network congestion during emergencies.

The FCC works with the National Communications System (NCS), a part of the Department of Homeland Security, to promote the use of Priority Services by the health care sector, the public safety community, and other entities involved in national security/emergency preparedness work. Those services include

Telecommunications Service Priority (TSP), Government Emergency Telecommunications Service (GETS) and Wireless Priority Service (WPS) programs. Enrollment of key circuits in the TSP program guarantees the user that in the event of a network disruption the telecommunications service provider will, by law, give the user priority treatment in either restoring those circuits or adding new ones.

The GETS program provides authorized users with priority call queuing over wireline networks when congestions arises. The WPS program provides the same priority call queuing feature, but over wireless systems. I urge you to participate in these programs. You will find information about them on the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau website.

An important initiative where the FCC is working closely with FEMA is Commercial Mobile Alerts. With the American public increasingly relying on wireless communications, and with approximately 260 million consumers using cell phones nationwide, not to mention the upsurge in instant messaging, it is essential that we support and advance new ways to share critical, time-sensitive information in times of crisis.

The FCC's Commercial Mobile Alert System (CMAS) has the potential to significantly impact the way Americans receive critical warnings on the go. As a result, individuals and families will be better informed and better able to take actions to protect themselves before, during and after an emergency or disaster.

Under the Commission's rules, participating carriers will have up to 28 months from the date FEMA makes available gateway interface specifications to develop, test and begin deployment of the system. FEMA is currently working towards making these specifications available. We are working with FEMA and industry representatives to make the CMAS operational as quickly as possible.

9-1-1 Location Accuracy

9-1-1 Location Accuracy is another example of how advances in technology can assist both first responders and the public in times of crisis. When someone picks up the phone and dials 9-1-1, they have every reason to believe that their call will be answered by an emergency operator regardless of what type of phone they are calling from: landline, wireless, or VoIP. In addition, there is certainly an expectation among the public that

that the 9-1-1 emergency operator have a reasonably good idea of the location of the 9-1-1 caller.

The FCC's Enhanced 9-1-1 Location Accuracy proceeding is a priority for us. Discussions continue on how best to measure the accuracy and reliability of E9-1-1 wireless calls. We are examining how best caller location can be effectively measured and are committed to bringing this issue to resolution so that the expectation of the 9-1-1 caller parallels with performance.

Cyber Security

Another area where technological advances have resulted in new concerns is in the area of cyber security. Recent attacks on Federal networks and the well-publicized attacks on commercial networks, illustrates that vulnerabilities exist. The increasing sophistication and maliciousness of these cyber security threats creates unique challenges for both government and the private sector.

The FCC is seeking to strengthen the protection of critical communications infrastructure, to assist in maintaining the operations of networks during cyber attacks, and to aid in swift recovery after. We are constantly evaluating capabilities in these areas to determine how to enhance detection and response to

cyber attacks. This is an important homeland security issue and we are committed to assisting in this effort on multiple fronts.

I encourage you to examine your own entities' network operating procedures and to develop a plan (if you have not done so) that addresses options for identifying and countering a cyber attack.

As we consider the possibilities created by new technology, however, we must not lose sight of the important fundamentals of planning, communication, and partnership. This is why we consider outreach to and communication with the National Association of State EMS Officials to be as much a priority as the initiatives I discussed earlier.

One way we seek to accomplish this outreach is through our Bureau's website and our Clearinghouse website, which provides a wealth of information for first responders, 9-1-1 Call Centers, the healthcare sector, persons with disabilities and state, local and tribal governments. On the Clearinghouse, we have posted links to other federal agency resources, guidelines for developing state and local emergency plans, case studies, best practices, and sample emergency plans from jurisdictions around the country.

There are currently over 250 public safety communications documents posted on the Clearinghouse which include original content developed by Bureau staff. We encourage you to take advantage of the information resources on the website, and help us improve it by submitting information that would benefit others in the public safety community. I look forward to your feedback, as we consider content for these web pages.

In addition to providing web-based resources, we also recognize the importance of direct outreach to public safety organizations, industry, and other governmental agencies on a variety of public safety and homeland security communications issues.

For example, last June several members of the FCC staff, in coordination with FEMA and HHS, visited state and local government officials and public safety representatives in the Gulf Coast Region to learn first-hand about their public safety communications operations and to highlight many of the initiatives that I've mentioned here today. The team conducted site visits in Houston, Baton Rouge, Biloxi, Mobile, and Tallahassee. Each of the visits included meetings with public safety officials and tours

of state or county emergency operations centers and 9-1-1 call centers, as well as area hospitals.

Over five days the team met with more than 350 public safety officials and healthcare representatives, and conducted twenty-six meetings through which they were able to assist more than 35 officials with their communications concerns.

In addition to the outreach activities I just mentioned, our Bureau also conducts quarterly summits, workshops and speaker series events. You can find further information on those events on our webpage. I also have some materials with me today that describe our outreach efforts.

In closing, I thank you again for this wonderful opportunity to speak with you. Your expert input—from both policy and operational perspectives-- will assist us greatly as we address critical public safety issues and initiatives pending before the FCC. FCC Chairman Genachowski and I, along with my colleagues at the FCC, look forward to continuing and enhancing our dialogue with you.

At this time, I would like to entertain any questions that you have.