ACTION MEMO

TO: State and Local Decision-Makers/Elected and Appointed Officials
FROM: SAFECOM and the National Council of Statewide Interoperability Coordinators (NCSWIC)
SUBJECT: **Sustaining Land Mobile Radio (LMR) Systems for First Responders and Public Safety Agencies**

Purpose: To provide state and local decision-makers with an overview of the importance of sustaining public safety radio systems.

Background: Public safety agencies (e.g., police, fire, EMS) use radio systems as the primary means of communication for day-to-day operations and during emergency response. Land Mobile Radio (LMR) systems provide the most reliable means of voice communications during response operations. While new technologies (e.g., cell phones) are being used to supplement emergency communications, they do not yet offer the consistency and reliability of services provided by LMR; therefore, it is critical for state and local officials to support and sustain LMR capabilities until the new technologies can ensure the reliability LMR provides and responders need.

Timeliness: The First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet), established in 2012, is tasked with deploying a new nationwide public safety broadband network (NPSBN) dedicated to first responder communications. Once completed, this network will provide a single system that public safety stakeholders at all levels of government can leverage during response operations. As FirstNet moves forward, leaders should know:

(a) Mission critical voice capabilities will not be part of the initial offering of FirstNet. FirstNet is focused on providing data capabilities at first launch. "FirstNet can't predict the arrival of mission critical voice in part because the standards are still under development."[1]

(b) FirstNet has advised public safety agencies to sustain current LMR communications systems throughout the planning and deployment of the NPSBN to ensure responders have communication capabilities

SAFECOM and NCSWIC recommend that public safety agencies and their decision-makers:

- Continue to fund and maintain current public safety radio systems to ensure mission critical voice capabilities are available for responders. Reducing or eliminating LMR funding could put lives at risk.
- Maintain awareness of FirstNet progress. Jurisdictions are being approached by vendors promoting broadband solutions and devices that promise voice capabilities and seamless integration to the NPSBN. Government leaders are encouraged to exercise caution when considering such purchases, as these devices have not been thoroughly tested or vetted by FirstNet. FirstNet will announce publicly when such capabilities have been vetted.
- Develop a strategy and plan for managing vendors to carefully evaluate purchases. State and local leaders should consult the FirstNet State Single Point of Contact (SPOC), Statewide Interoperability Coordinator (SWIC), Statewide Interoperability Governing Body (SIGB), and/or Statewide Interoperability Executive Committee (SIEC), and the Statewide Communication Interoperability Plan (SCIP), before purchasing broadband equipment.
- Share the strategy and plan among their public safety agencies. Such collaboration should help ensure purchases support the overall plan to improve emergency communications in their respective states, as well as well as support the state's integration into the NPSBN (if applicable).

A unified strategy established in advance will guarantee public safety communications purchases support the statewide plan to improve interoperability; avoid costly investments in solutions and devices that may not provide comparable voice services; ensure funds are maintained for LMR systems; and ensure mission critical voice capabilities are available for first responders. For more information on this issue, see the additional resources provided below:

- LMR Trio – three papers on LMR technologies, at: https://www.dhs.gov/safecom/funding
- For more information on FirstNet, see: http://www.firstnet.gov/
- To find the SWIC for your state, see: https://www.dhs.gov/safecom/contact-information

Douglas M. Aiken
SAFECOM Co-Chair
National Public Safety
Telecommunications Council

Mark Grubb
SAFECOM Co-Chair
National Council of Statewide
Interoperability Coordinators

Robert Symons
NCSWIC Chair, Wyoming SWIC, Wyoming
Office of Homeland Security, Wyoming Public
Safety Communications Commission

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[1] http://www.firstnet.gov/content/firstnet-will-enhance-public-safety-communications-delivering-mission-critical-data-and