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~~Verbal~~ testimony submitted to the Oregon Legislature Joint Ways & Means Committee
Thursday, April 23, 2009

Honorable Chairs, Co-Chairs and Members of the Joint Ways and Means Committee:

My name is David Crawford. I have served my community as a firefighter for the past 30 years, 24 years as the Fire Chief. I also have the honor to have served as the 911 Advisory Board Chair for more than 12 years. During those years emergency communication systems have run the gamut from telephone trees to digital paging in my district. I am here today to ask you to continue funding the Oregon Wireless Interoperability Network.

Communication is the single most important element involved in successful emergency operations. The ability to communicate effectively on an emergency scene with other responding agencies and disciplines is especially critical today when it often takes multiple agencies to work an emergency incident. It is also without question the problem most often cited in incident critique. A recent example of this is when the disastrous flooding occurred along the Nehalem River in December of 2007 our fire district lost all radio contact with the Clatsop County Sheriff's Office and with Astoria 9-1-1. The communities we protect were abruptly thrown back to the days of the telephone tree. Emergency calls from a portion of our fire district went unanswered until the service could be transferred to Columbia County 9-1-1. Communications slowly got better, but even today communications with many of our mutual aid partners are difficult at best and are often unachievable. Delayed response times and duplication of services do occur, mostly due to incompatible radio systems, differing frequencies and mountainous terrain. However the Oregon Wireless Interoperability Network will eliminate those issues if it is implemented.

For my region in Northwest Oregon which includes Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook and Washington Counties, OWIN's implementation means truly universal radio communications access for all of our public safety organizations, without regard to political boundaries. It means that while responding to emergency incidents responding police can easily communicate with responding fire units, with ODOT responders and with city public works personnel, whether it is a routine or a catastrophic incident. It means public safety organizations can coordinate their efforts and work together as a single team, effectively and efficiently. It also means that our communities, no matter where they are located in this great state, will be better served and more efficiently protected when OWIN is in place.

We are all feeling the pain of the current economic crisis, trying to find ways of doing more with less. OWIN represents the very definition of that concept. In addition to making emergency communication more effective, OWIN makes the process more efficient. Seamless statewide communications means consolidation of valuable resources is possible. Regional dispatch centers will be possible and a coordinated emergency communications system will emerge from the many locally operated and incompatible existing systems. The many partnerships with public and private organizations not only reduce the cost of the project, they also pull those various organizations together in cooperation and shared mission. And, in the near term, the project will also create some badly needed jobs.

Others have shared the details of the project with you, I am sure. My hope is that in sharing some of the communications nightmares of the past and a brief glimpse of what can be in the future, you will agree that this program is worth far more than it will cost. I believe it to be one of those innovations that occur once in a generation, and in doing so makes our communities ever safer and more secure.

Thank you. Please contact me if you have questions or wish further information.

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