TESTIMONY OF DAVID BILLSTROM
TO THE WASHINGTON STATE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
TECHNOLOGY, ENERGY AND COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE
Full Committee Work Session: Interoperability and Enhanced 911 (E-911)
Chairman Representative Jeff Morris
House Hearing Room E, John L. O'Brien Building, Olympia WA
8:00am January 19, 2007

Mr Chairman, and members of the Committee…
Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is David Billstrom, and I am a public safety communications consultant with a long background in the computer industry and in venture capital. I've also been a first responder for over 25 years in EMS and Search & Rescue, and I'm currently a volunteer firefighter in San Juan County.

I want to thank Representative Ericks for his thoughtful comments and perspective.

Representative Ericks asked me to come today and share my views as an independent systems integrator and consultant on public safety systems. He asked me to give you my high-level views on the broader issues of interoperability.

What is Interoperability?

I want to tell you that this report from the Department of Homeland Security's SAFECOM program – just released a few weeks ago – is the 6th federally funded study I've seen on interoperability where a key finding is the need for procedures, practice and exercises. In fact, the data here proved that emphasis on procedures and practice *predicts* the effective use of interoperability.

So I'm not going out on a limb when I say that there are four (4) central issues to effective interoperability:

- standard operating procedures
- regular training and practice on those procedures
- emphasis on local agencies, since they arrive first to the majority of incidents
- equipment

I want to emphasize that 3 of those 4 issues are about methodology and procedures, not equipment.

This may come as a surprise to you, and many of the public, because of the relentless media attention on incompatible radio equipment on 9/11 and in Katrina. The studies, including the FCC Commission on Katrina, conclude that the other three factors deserve equal weight.

Most people have a tendency to go directly to the equipment issues, which is legitimate and understandable. We *do* have equipment issues. But interoperability deserves a systemic approach, with equal weight to all four issues.

Okay, let's talk about cost.

Statewide interoperability systems are expensive. Oregon's governor has just proposed $561M for the *first phase* of their system.

Fortunately, other states have gone before Washington, including Florida with a $1B system and New York with a $2B system, both from the same vendor, both proprietary hardware systems.

If today, those states faced the decision we face, it is safe to assume that they would look to the U.S. military and the open, standards-based, software technology the military has been using with great success for the past several years: IP radio.

The truth is that open, standards-based approaches have a long history of driving the cost of technology down and pushing quality and features up.

My own personal bias, having started my career at Intel Corporation, is that open, standards-based software will revolutionize public safety communications. There are essentially two simple reasons for this:

- it allows you to use older, legacy equipment. The radios we already own.
- we enjoy upgrades and improvements in the future without wholesale equipment replacement, avoiding what the radio industry calls "a forklift upgrade"

This means local agencies in Washington -- including my own San Juan County Fire Department -- can achieve a realistic level of interoperability <u>without buying new radios</u>.

Which as we all know, will cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

If I could leave you with a central message today, it would be this:

First, we need to give equal weight to all four elements of interoperability.

Second, an interoperability plan for the six state agencies is valuable and important. But it is absolutely critical that all of our actions and funding decisions incorporate the needs of local agencies; the agencies that provide most of the public safety response.

Third, we have a technology in front of us, already embraced elsewhere, that will meet several of our most critical needs and save lives.

Thank you.