

Testimony of William Brenner
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AFSCME Council 13

Good morning. My name is William Brenner, Assistant to the Executive Director of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, Council 13. I am here on behalf of Executive Director David Fillman and more than 5,000 employees we represent who are employed with the Department of Transportation. I would like to take a moment to thank the chairman for this opportunity to enter testimony.

As a former employee of the Department of Transportation, I certainly can testify first hand to the urgent and critical need for a communication system that gives us the ability to communicate with our various field district offices, supervisors, other employees, and as well as with other agencies, such as the Pennsylvania State Police when emergencies occur.

Our tool to accomplish that is the Pennsylvania Public Safety Radio System, better known as the 800 MHZ Radio System. This radio

system was put into operation and the Department began testing this system in the early part of 2004.

Initially there were tremendous problems with the system. System coverage appeared to be the greatest problem, as there were huge areas of dead spots along with areas of no coverage. As time progressed we had many meetings with the Department Representatives to address concerns we had with the inadequacy of the system, which were also concerns of the Department.

Through much discussion with us and various contractors, the Department was able to correct a great deal of the problems with the system. But as of this date, problems still exist with the 800 MHZ Radio System.

The majority of our problems with this system still deal with the “no coverage areas”, where there is absolutely no communication available in these areas. Primarily this occurs in more remote areas such as Bradford County and Susquehanna County in the northeast, Tioga and Potter Counties in the north central, and various areas in Warren and Forest Counties in our northwest region of the state.

Geographic areas such as these described seem to be difficult for any type of communication systems, such as cell phone communication, and they are. But let me say that we still have problems in areas of Dauphin and Cumberland Counties that have no coverage available.

More specific problems with this system are Department vehicles, one following the other, at times cannot communicate with each other. Hand held radios linked with this system cannot communicate at times with Department vehicles while performing flagging operations, a critical part of public safety, and at various work site locations.

I emphasize without communications it puts the public, as well as the members, at risk. When the system was first put into place, we were told we would have the ability to communicate directly with the Pennsylvania State Police, and this still is not available.

Let me take a moment to discuss the duties and responsibilities our members are accountable for as it relates to the critical need for a communication system that is flawless and reliable. Our equipment