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Testimony of

Naomi Wyatt, Secretary of Administration

before the

Senate Transportation & Law and Justice Committees

regarding

Pennsylvania's Public Safety Radio Network

April 19, 2010 – 11:00 am – Hearing Room 1, North Office Building

Chairman Pippy, Chairman Rafferty, Chairman Logan, Chairman Stout, and Members of the Committees, thank you for coordinating your committees and for inviting me to talk about the commonwealth's public safety radio network.

I welcome this opportunity to speak with you directly and I am pleased to be here with my colleagues from the Pennsylvania State Police and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation—agencies that effectively use the radio system thousands of times each day.

Three key questions seem to be at the core of all the rhetoric surrounding the public safety radio network:

1. Does it work?
2. Why did it cost so much?
3. Is it worth it?

Let's take them one at a time.

Does it work?

Yes. It works. Last year nearly 40 million "push-to-talk" transactions were successfully completed, with millions more successful data-related transactions including, for example, instant access to state and federal law enforcement databases for State Police officers from their vehicles.

More than 43,000 square miles of the commonwealth now have radio coverage from a network with 877 high-profile towers and low-profile microcell sites. Network and regional operations centers monitor operations 24/7, re-routing around disruptions within seconds and resulting in 99.9999% network up time.

While the Pennsylvania State Police and PennDOT are the network's largest users, in all, fourteen state agencies—whose missions range from law enforcement to public health to environmental protection—use the network on a daily basis, as do the Capitol Police and your House and Senate security forces. And the network has been called upon and performed well in complex, high-profile public events such as last year's G20 in Pittsburgh and various NASCAR races in the Poconos.

Despite the network's excellent performance, it does continue to work through certain challenges. In this respect, the commonwealth's public safety radio network is no different than Sprint or Verizon or any other provider.

Terrain challenges, especially in the northern tier, have made it difficult to secure landowner permission and build the number of sites necessary to achieve full coverage. Integration across 14 agencies and their fleets—particularly with third-party hardware and software—poses unique issues. FCC-recognized bandwidth interference from both cellular carriers and other radio networks requires constant vigilance. And, as with any change of this magnitude, users' expectations, habits, and training also come into play.