POLICE COMMISSIONER RAYMOND W. KELLY
TESTIMONY ON SAFEGUARDING OUR FUTURE:
BUILDING A NATIONWIDE NETWORK FOR FIRST RESPONDERS
U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, & TRANSPORTATION
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Good morning, Chairman Rockefeller, Senator Hutchison, members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude for this bipartisan effort on behalf of public safety. Thanks to the leadership of Senator Rockefeller, Congressman King, and members of Congress on both sides of the aisle, we are closer than ever to providing our nation's first responders with a tool they desperately need: a nationwide broadband network dedicated to public safety. It was extremely encouraging to see President Obama expressing his firm support for this initiative last week.

I come to Washington today as the head of a police department that will benefit enormously from this technology. I consider it essential to the future of our mission. I know this view is shared by law enforcement agencies and fire departments, large and small, urban and rural across this country.

That's because our existing communications systems are fast becoming obsolete. Like virtually all other public safety organizations, the New York City Police Department relies principally on the use of two-way voice radios to communicate with responding officers and direct them to a scene. However, this technology is extremely limited. We cannot use it to exchange electronic data. And although we have made progress on local radio interoperability, the lack of a common radio spectrum prevents us from establishing a truly seamless nationwide system for all first responders.

Today, a 16-year-old with a smart phone has a more advanced communications capability than a police officer or deputy carrying a radio. Given the technology that is available, and the complexity of the threat we face, that is unacceptable. It will only change if we succeed in building a nationwide broadband network to a mission-critical grade of service.

In New York City, this would enable the NYPD to fully leverage the powerful technology that we use in our Real Time Crime Center. This is a state-of-the art computer facility we opened at our headquarters in 2005. It is supported by a massive database containing billions of public and private records. We've made this database searchable with the latest software. Around the clock, crime center detectives take calls from investigators in the field, looking to follow up on various leads they've obtained: a partial license plate, a seemingly untraceable cell phone number, a nickname or even a tattoo. They conduct instant, on the spot searches, something that previously took days of calling, faxing between agencies, and combing through paper files.

We're also about to launch a facial recognition unit within the Real Time Crime Center. It will use digital technology to match video images of people at crime scenes to mug shots on file.

With a dedicated broadband network, we would be able to push this information out to tens of thousands of officers on patrol. For example, an officer using a handheld device operating on this network could receive detailed information before he or she arrives at a location. This would include who lives there; whether or not the police have been there before and why; and if any of the occupants has an outstanding warrant, an order of protection, or a firearms license.

Such a network could also provide officers with an immediate, digital snapshot of anyone they detain. It would give them the suspect's address, prior arrest history, and other critical details. The officer would be able to take electronic fingerprints at the scene and compare them instantaneously with those in local, state, and federal databases. This kind of situational awareness is vital to the safety of the officers and members of the public. And it represents the next generation of law enforcement communications.

But we can't get there without a safe, secure, and effective broadband network over which to deliver this information, one that is built and run to public safety specifications, and one that we can control. We know from past experience that we can't depend on systems run by the private sector. They are too susceptible to failure in a crisis. On September 11th and after the 2009 crash of a commercial jet in the Hudson River, cell phone networks were deluged and police and fire communications over them became virtually impossible.

That's a grave concern in light of the threat we face from terrorism. The New York City Police Department trains every day to prepare for large-scale disasters. But we need a network that will support a multi-agency response and all of the technology we use to keep the city safe.

To give you one example, as part of our response to the attempted car bombing in Times Square last May, we deployed a robot to inspect the vehicle. As is the case with all of our robots, it was controlled by its operator through a thin, fiber-optic cable. Our need to maneuver around fire hoses and other obstacles on the street increased the risk that the cable would be run over and severed. If that had happened, we would have lost control of the robot.

With an adequate broadband network in place, we wouldn't have to worry about that. We could control robots wirelessly, thereby removing these risks.

It would also make it easier and safer to conduct complex operations involving more than one robot – say if we found a secondary device at a bomb scene. With wireless, broadband technology, we wouldn't have to be concerned about managing multiple cables. We could also share the video feeds from our robots with the federal government and other law enforcement agencies in real time.

Right now, these capacities do not exist. But they will if we build this network.

Every public safety agency in the nation supports this effort. That is why I urge Congress in the strongest possible terms to allocate the D Block directly to public safety, and to ensure funding for this vital resource. We need adequate bandwidth, network control, and the higher standard of reliability and survivability that only a public safety network can provide. Together with our partners from across the country, the New York City Police Department looks forward to the day when we can share a broadband capability that delivers voice, video, and data on a dedicated wireless network. For the sake of the security of cities and towns throughout our nation, I sincerely hope we see that day soon.

Thank you again for this chance to testify. I would be pleased to answer any of your questions.