

**Statement of Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate  
At FCC *En Banc* Hearing on Public Safety Communications  
Brooklyn Borough Hall Hearing Room  
Brooklyn, New York  
July 30, 2008**

Thank you, Chairman Martin, for holding this timely and relevant hearing regarding public safety communications and the 700 MHz D block proceeding. We could not be in a more appropriate location than New York City to consider the needs of our nation's first responders as together we all seek to establish interoperable public safety communications.

I am pleased that we have witnesses participating today from a wide variety of backgrounds, including police officers, fire chiefs, and other public safety representatives, commercial service providers, and technical experts. Indeed, this is exactly the type of conversation that we need and that I have urged. Without a clear knowledge of the unique needs of public safety, it is difficult for the Commission to set appropriate rules for the 700 MHz D block, and it is even more difficult for service providers to meet these unique needs. Accordingly, to the extent we decide to facilitate a public/private partnership or other cooperative efforts between commercial providers and public safety, we must be clear about exactly what will be required of the commercial partner(s) in terms of coverage, reliability, functionality, network hardening, quality of service, and other factors. Similarly, without clear knowledge beforehand of the communications capabilities that can and cannot be provided, and at what price, all our conversation solves little. Therefore, I hope this event takes a major step

forward in identifying the specific needs of our first responders and exactly how they may best be served.

As I observed in May when we adopted the *Further Notice* on the 700 MHz D block, to the extent the Commission adopts a public/private partnership to build a nationwide, interoperable network, we also should recognize that establishing the specifications for such a network is a complicated process. Such a process is regularly handled elsewhere in government, including at the Federal, State, and municipal level, often through the use of requests for proposals (RFPs). Several commenters, including service providers as well as local governments, noted the feasibility of an approach based on RFPs. I look forward to learning more about how this might work for the 700 MHz D block and whether it would help us better serve the needs of the public safety community.

In addition, as we consider our options for the 700 MHz D block, I also want to encourage discussion of the interoperable communications that already have been established. We should recognize the efforts of State, local, and private entities to create their own public/private partnerships or otherwise take the steps they need to establish interoperable communications systems. As a former State official, I have worked hard to ensure that the Commission's rules work with, not against, the best efforts of State and local governments.

More recently, I have learned about some of these excellent efforts. On Monday, I had the distinct honor of visiting the heroes of the New York Police Department. Deputy Chief Dowd provided me with an informative,

on-site tour of the interoperable communications capabilities of New York's finest, and I am pleased that he is here today to share his knowledge and the successes and challenges of integrating the New York boroughs – police, fire and emergency services. Their state of the art 911 center is not merely innovative but transcends usual turf issues by bringing emergency, fire and police under one visionary, technologically premiere wonder. In May, I again toured the site of a recent national tragedy, this time learning about the public safety communications facilities of New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish, and I again received a first-hand view of local government efforts that have created interoperable communications for first responders. There are lessons to be learned from these real-world examples that may be useful to public safety communications systems of different sizes, in different parts of the country, and with highly differentiated needs. In addition, these established systems want to and should be integrated into any national network.

I encourage our panelists to address how these issues may best be addressed. In particular, as the Commission considers how to assist public safety as it establishes rules for the 700 MHz D block, and as public safety entities utilize 700 MHz spectrum as well as other bands to meet their needs, what policies and procedures need to be established to ensure an integrated, interoperable communications network for public safety? What specific steps should be taken to ensure that the concerns of local governments – some of which we may hear today as well as those expressed in comments by Charlotte, N.C.; Houston, TX; Montgomery County, MD; the New York City Police Department; Philadelphia, PA; San Francisco, CA; and Washington, DC – are addressed in the rules we adopt for this spectrum?

We have a legal and moral obligation to assist public safety providers in developing their communications infrastructure in order to fulfill their critical, life-saving mission. Thank you for your participation today, for all you do to keep America and her citizens safe, and for your input as we strive to meet our obligation to the public safety community and, ultimately, to the American public.