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Public Safety Groups Urge House Action On E9-1-1 Bill

Bill Would Provide Grants to States for Emergency Call Centers

*Anniversary of 9/11 Attacks Highlights 9-1-1 Centers' Role
As "First Responders Among First Responders"*

Washington -- On the second anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, public safety groups urged the House of Representatives to approve legislation that would bolster 9-1-1 emergency call centers.

The joint statement by the National Emergency Number Association (NENA) and the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) came as the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet held a hearing on H.R. 2898. The bill, introduced by Reps. John Shimkus (R-IL) and Anna Eshoo (D-CA), would provide federal grants to accelerate the spread of "enhanced" 9-1-1 services (E9-1-1), which enable dispatchers to identify the precise location of callers.

The Senate Commerce Committee approved similar legislation (S. 1250), offered by Sens. Conrad Burns (R-MT) and Hillary Clinton (D-NY), on July 17.

"Emergency call centers are often the *first* responders among first responders, which is why this hearing is so timely and relevant on the anniversary of the 9/11 attacks," said Richard Taylor, president of NENA and executive director of the North Carolina Wireless 911 Board. "Stronger 9-1-1 systems are vital to protect both our local communities and homeland security.

"In today's world, federal leadership and financial support for 9-1-1 are essential," Taylor added. "We applaud the sponsors for their effort and pledge to work closely with all parties to enact such legislation."

Among those testifying at the hearing are Tim Berry, State Treasurer of Indiana, and Anthony Haynes, executive director of the Tennessee Emergency Communications Board. Both are national leaders on E9-1-1 issues and active members of NENA.

9-1-1 Systems Hampered by Budget Woes

Across the United States, the 9-1-1 system is plagued by longstanding policy, technical, and operational problems. For example, 407 counties and tribal nations either have no 9-1-1 service at all, or can only receive voice calls with no data on the caller's physical location or call-back number. Only about 10% of the more than 6,000 emergency call centers have the ability to determine the precise location of wireless callers to 9-1-1.

One of the reasons that progress is lagging is state and local budget problems. Most telephone consumers pay state-level surcharges on their phone bills that are intended to pay for upgrades and operations of 9-1-1 call centers. But unfortunately, in many states and localities, these funds are being siphoned away to pay for other government programs. Last year, state agencies diverted \$53 million in California, \$9 million in Oregon, \$10 million in Rhode Island, and \$6 million in Washington state to other projects from taxes collected for E9-1-1 implementation, according to audit reports.

H.R. 2898 would withhold federal grants from states that divert their own 9-1-1 funds.

In another sign of heightened awareness of 9-1-1 budget problems, in June, a blue-ribbon task force of Nobel laureates, U.S. military leaders, and other experts called for a \$10.4 billion investment in 9-1-1 services over five years. The call for increased 9-1-1 funding was part of a homeland security budget analysis issued by the Independent Task Force on Emergency Responders, led by former Senator Warren Rudman and former White House terrorism and cyber-security chief Richard Clarke. The full report is available at www.cfr.org.

In the private sector, telephone carriers, policy makers and public safety officials are working together to speed implementation of E9-1-1 capabilities. Under the banner of NENA's Strategic Wireless Action Team (SWAT), stakeholder organizations are working on action plans and policy recommendations to accelerate progress in the near term, and to maintain the system in the face of future technological advances.

The new NENA-APCO position paper spells out the public safety groups' views on specific provisions of the bill, and can be accessed at www.nena.org.

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A not-for-profit corporation, the National Emergency Number Association (NENA) is the only educational organization dedicated solely to the study, advancement and implementation of 9-1-1 as America's universal emergency number. For more information, visit www.nena.org. Another helpful Web site is www.e911institute.org.