

January 23, 2008

The Honorable Daniel Inouye
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Capitol Building, S-131
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Capitol Building, S-146A
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Obey
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Capitol Building, H-218
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Lewis
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Longworth House Office Building, 1016
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Inouye and Obey and Ranking Members Cochran and Lewis,

As you consider the proposed American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the more than 7,000 members of the National Emergency Number Association (NENA) strongly encourage you to consider investing in technology to support 9-1-1 and emergency communications systems. A significant focus of the economic stimulus legislation concerns investment in infrastructure and the promotion of broadband access for all Americans. There can be no more critical infrastructure than the 9-1-1 systems relied on by the public and the emergency communications systems used by those responding to emergencies. Similarly, while promotion of broadband access for the general public is an important investment, it is even more important for the future of 9-1-1 and emergency communications, which will increasingly depend on high bandwidth networks to effectively prepare for, and respond to, emergencies. Therefore, we write today to urge you to place a clear priority in the economic stimulus legislation on the need for investment in infrastructure and access to advanced services networks, both wired and wireless, and the services and applications for safety organizations enabled by such networks, including the establishment of IP backbone networks and the application layer software infrastructure needed to interconnect the multitude of emergency response organizations. Doing so offers an opportunity for job creation and economic stimulus while simultaneously improving the safety of all Americans.

There are existing programs that can be utilized to achieve this goal that are consistent with the overall direction of the draft Recovery and Reinvestment bill. Specifically, programs within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) and the Department of Agriculture's Rural Utility Service (RUS) could be utilized. Current drafts of the Recovery and Reinvestment Act would provide nearly \$3 billion to RUS for loans for broadband buildout in rural areas and similar amounts in broadband investment grants to be administered by NTIA. Both of these agencies have existing authority and prior experience in providing grants and loans for the purpose of advancing 9-1-1 and emergency communications. Therefore, we request that any proposed economic stimulus legislation take advantage of this existing authority and experience and require RUS and NTIA to direct portions of grants and loans administered by the agencies for the purpose of ensuring all 9-1-1 centers and emergency response entities have access to broadband networks and the services and applications enabled by such networks. Deploying broadband networks, establishing emergency service inter-networks that utilize such capacity and developing the software applications, information services, and system interfaces required to take advantage of such infrastructure will truly bring emergency communications into the 21st century. Doing so will also provide for the employment of a significant number of communications and information technology professionals along the way.

Specifically, the Department of Agriculture, through RUS, should be directed to issue a Notice of Funds Availability (NOFA) and immediately begin accepting and processing applications for low-interest loans

through the “9-1-1 Access Program” established under Section 6107 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. The loan program gives RUS authority to make loans to State or local governments, Indian tribes, or other public entities for facilities and equipment to expand or improve in rural areas “9-1-1 access, integrated interoperable emergency communications, including multiuse networks that provide commercial or transportation information services in addition to emergency communications services, homeland security communications, transportation safety communications, or location technologies used outside an urbanized area.” RUS should use broad, flexible criteria to evaluate and grant loans under this program to facilitate emergency information and communications technology deployment in rural areas.

Additionally, a significant portion of grant funds administered by NTIA should be provided to states to ensure that all 9-1-1 centers and emergency response agencies have adequate broadband connectivity and are interconnected on shared regional or statewide emergency services IP networks, with the necessary application layer software and services to enable modern information sharing. A funding vehicle could be through the E9-1-1 Implementation and Coordination Office (ICO), a joint program between NTIA and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), authorized under the ENHANCE 911 Act of 2004. The ICO could establish terms and conditions associated with the grants, but allow states to retain some flexibility to determine how best to distribute the funds. The ICO is already authorized to administer a \$250 million per year grant program, but the authorization limits grant distribution to 9-1-1 centers. Therefore, the authorization should be expanded for the broader purpose of funding not only 9-1-1 centers, but also all emergency response agencies. Placing the ICO in charge of administering such a broad program would be consistent with the NET 911 Improvement Act of 2008, which broadened the eligible use of grant funds to include “the migration to an IP-enabled emergency network” and tasked the ICO with issuing a plan for “migrating to a national IP-enabled emergency network capable of receiving and responding to all citizen-activated emergency communications and improving information sharing among all emergency response entities.” (PL 110-283)

In addition, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act offers an opportunity to invest in upgrades in 9-1-1 systems, largely in rural America, that are still not capable of locating wireless 9-1-1 callers. Over twenty percent of counties still lack the latest technology necessary to ensure that a 9-1-1 call made using a mobile phone can be automatically located. The ENHANCE 911 Act grant program should receive \$130 million in appropriations to help achieve Phase II wireless E9-1-1 deployment throughout the country. Such an appropriation would be sufficient to ensure that in any county in America, urban or rural, on a traditional landline or a wireless phone, the 9-1-1 call center will be capable of automatically locating 9-1-1 calls and providing an effective emergency response.

Implementing these recommendations is only the tip of the iceberg to truly advance the emergency communications and response system in America. Numerous additional steps would still need to be taken to foster the migration from an analog, voice-centric system, into a 21st century, next generation, IP-based emergency services model that embraces a wide range of voice, video, and data applications. However, these recommendations would be a positive start and would be an important aspect of a job-creating economic stimulus, with the parallel benefit of improving public safety. Until all emergency response agencies and individual responders can access wired and wireless broadband connections and utilize the services and applications enabled by such networks, the migration to the next generation of truly integrated and interoperable emergency communications will remain a mere vision. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act offers an opportunity to simultaneously enhance emergency communications in America and promote investment and job creation. We urge you to take advantage of this opportunity.

Sincerely,
Brian Fontes
CEO – National Emergency Number Association (NENA)

cc: Members of the Senate and House Appropriations Committees

The Honorable Jay Rockefeller, Chairman, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

The Honorable Henry Waxman, Chairman, House Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Joe Barton, Ranking Member, House Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Rick Boucher, Chairman, House Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet

The Honorable Cliff Stearns, Ranking Member, House Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet

The Honorable Anna Eshoo, Co-Chair, Congressional E9-1-1 Caucus

The Honorable John Shimkus, Co-Chair, Congressional E9-1-1 Caucus