



CONNECTICUT POLICE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION

342 North Main Street, West Hartford, Connecticut 06117-2507

(860) 586-7506 Fax: (860) 586-7550 Web site: www.cpcanet.org

Testimony to the Committee on Energy and Technology

March 11, 2010 by

Chiefs James Strillacci and Anthony Salvatore, Connecticut Police Chiefs Association

Senator Fonfara, Representative Nardello, and members of the Energy and Technology Committee, we speak on behalf of the state's police chiefs in opposition to **Raised Bill #420 An Act Concerning the Broadcast of Local Police Dispatch Calls**.

This bill would require local police departments to transmit routine calls over unencrypted radio channels. In other words, it would prohibit local police from transmitting non-emergency calls on encrypted channels.

Encryption is no threat to open government. Recordings of police radio transmissions are public records and are subject to the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act.

We are told that the impetus for this proposal is that news media want access to police communications as they occur. This access may be a desirable asset for a news agency in a competitive environment, but it does not outweigh the public-safety benefits of encryption.

Encryption allows police to communicate freely without being overheard by burglars, drug dealers, or others who would like advance warning of police activity. It allows efficient transmission of information helpful to a police activity but of a sensitive nature and not appropriate for public broadcast—a witness' name or address, victim information, medical status, juvenile information, an officer's cell-phone or home number, for example.

Further, encryption is an optional radio feature which does not come free of charge. This bill would deprive communities of that value without any compensation.

Finally, the bill would allow the Department of Public Safety to adopt regulations establishing criteria for routine versus non-routine communications. Calls for police service are subject to sudden and unpredictable changes in nature and severity, so it will be difficult set criteria which are both comprehensive and comprehensible. That the task is given to DPS—an agency which is itself exempt from this bill's provisions—does not inspire our confidence. We fear that imperfectly drafted regulations may endanger officers or the public by restricting communications in ambiguous situations which turn out to be perilous.

Its intentions may be honorable, but this bill will do more harm than good. The Connecticut police chiefs urge you to reject it.

###