



September 14th, 2026

Chairman King and Members
House Committee on State Affairs
Texas House of Representatives

RE: Written Testimony on Strengthening Interoperable Communications

Chairman King and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding interoperable emergency communications in Texas.

Texas Policy Research Action supports ensuring that first responders can communicate effectively during emergencies. Interoperability is a legitimate public-safety objective, but achieving it does not require broad state control over local purchasing decisions or the creation of an unaccountable permanent bureaucracy.

Texas should establish objective, technology-neutral compatibility standards. Those standards should describe the performance necessary for systems to communicate, not prescribe particular vendors, products, or technical architectures. Compliance should ordinarily be demonstrated through certification rather than requiring each political subdivision to obtain individualized permission from the governor or an appointed council before purchasing equipment.

If state review is necessary, it should be limited to determining whether a proposed system would materially impair regional interoperability. The process should include firm and reasonably short deadlines, written findings based upon published standards, automatic approval when deadlines are missed, and meaningful appeal rights. State oversight should not become a mechanism for delaying local emergency-readiness projects or directing communities toward government-preferred vendors.

Before establishing a new council, lawmakers should determine which responsibilities cannot be performed through the Texas Division of Emergency Management, the Department of Public Safety, existing regional systems, and voluntary agreements among local governments. Any council should have narrowly defined duties, balanced representation, limited rulemaking authority, and a meaningful Sunset date.

The council should remain subject to the Texas Open Meetings Act, Public Information Act, and ordinary administrative rulemaking requirements. Narrow exceptions may protect specific tactical information, cybersecurity vulnerabilities, or legitimate proprietary material. Those exceptions should not conceal grant criteria, award decisions, spending, vendor relationships, final actions, or the standards governing local purchases.

Any grant program should operate through express legislative appropriations, objective eligibility criteria, transparent scoring, performance-based agreements, and meaningful oversight. Authority to use any available funds or accept donations from interested private organizations could weaken legislative control and create conflicts of interest. Vendors and entities that may benefit from council decisions should not finance the entity making those decisions.

Integrated systems must also include clear cybersecurity and privacy safeguards. Policies should define what information may be collected, who may access it, how long it may be retained, and when it may be shared. Emergency interoperability should not become the foundation for surveillance unrelated to disaster response.

Success should be measured by whether responders can communicate during actual emergencies, not by the number of grants awarded, employees hired, or plans produced.

Texas can improve emergency communications through open standards, competitive markets, voluntary coordination, local flexibility, and transparent government. Public safety is best served when technology solves an operational problem without unnecessarily expanding centralized power.

Thank you for your consideration

For Liberty, For Texas!

Jeremy D. Kitchen
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