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Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 Twelfth Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: WT 02-55 Improving Public Safety Communications in the 800 MHz Band

Dear Madame Secretary,

One of the most pressing issues firefighters and other first responders face today is 800 MHz interference to their radios. In these times of heightened security and alert, our first responders need the support of the FCC in resolving this critical issue. No one can argue that highly reliable communications for public safety professionals does not save lives.

Interference in the 800 MHz band can come between a firefighter on the front line of defense and the chain of decision-makers assisting in an emergency situation. In fact, it is estimated that public safety agencies will experience interference at more than 350 locations this year – the highest single-year total to date. The trend is alarming and foreshadows the day when communications are interrupted during a future catastrophic event.

The Consensus Plan proposal for the realignment of the radio spectrum is the only solution to the current situation supported by all the major public safety organizations, including our national association, the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and the Southeastern Division of the IAFC, Southeastern Association of Fire Chiefs, representing Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia.

We advocate for the Consensus Plan because it:

- Remedies interference to public safety communications systems and private wireless systems operating at 800 MHz

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- Minimizes disruption to existing licensees and services - 70 percent of existing private wireless incumbents achieve benefits of Consensus Plan without any system modifications whatsoever
- Ensures public safety agencies have access to additional spectrum to support their critical missions
- Requires no federal, state or local funding to implement

In a nutshell, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. I urge you and the FCC to adopt the Consensus Plan and to expedite implementation as quickly as possible.

Respectfully Submitted,

DENNIS J. MERRIFIELD
Fire Chief