



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

May 23, 2023

Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government Testimony on Senate Bill 218

Good Afternoon!

Thank you Chairman Tomczyk and committee members for hearing Senate Bill 218, which would create a grant program for public safety interoperable communication system upgrades.

While much of the cost for replacing the Wisconsin Interoperability System for Communications (WISCOM) technology and infrastructure updates is a responsibility of the state, many local agencies will likely need to update their radios and associated technology. SB 218 creates a grant program to assist local agencies with those costs.

WISCOM is a radio system that permits emergency responders from public safety agencies to communicate across jurisdictions. State and local agencies may choose to use WISCOM as their primary radio system. These agencies are called daily users.

The current system was developed in 2012 and has reached its end-of-life. The Department of Military Affairs (DMA) is in the process of building the system's replacement. The WISCOM replacement must ensure the system can deliver public-safety grade communications to current users, expand to support other users at the state and local levels, and provide interoperability with other communications systems.

The grant program would require a 20% local match. Additionally, SB 218 specifies that for the first 4 years of the program, 70% of available funds would be designated to WISCOM daily users.

It is our intention to request funding during the budget process for this grant program.

This proposal has received bi-partisan support in both houses of the Legislature.

Thank you again to the committee for hearing SB 218, and your timely action on the bill.



TONY KURTZ

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 50th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government
Senate Bill 218

Good morning, Chairman Tomczyk and committee members. Thank you for holding this hearing today on Senate Bill 218.

The Wisconsin Interoperability System for Communications (WISCOM) is a radio system that permits emergency responders from public safety agencies to communicate across jurisdictions. State and local agencies may choose to use WISCOM as their primary radio system. These agencies are called daily users.

The current system was developed in 2012 and has reached its end-of-life. The Department of Military Affairs is in the process of building the system's replacement. The WISCOM replacement must ensure the system can deliver public-safety grade communications to current users, expand to support other users at the state and local levels, and provide interoperability with other communications systems.

While much of the cost of replacing the WISCOM system's technology and infrastructure updates is a responsibility of the state, many local agencies will likely need to update their radios and associated technology as well. Senate Bill 218 creates a grant program to assist local agencies with those costs.

For the first four years of the grant, 70% of available funds would be designated to WISCOM daily users. Daily users are agencies that use WISCOM as their primary radio network. In the first four years, if an agency wanted to become a daily user the local unit of government would submit a written resolution or commitment stating its intention to join the statewide public safety interoperable communication system as well as committing a 20% grant match. The remaining 30% of available funds would be available to any interoperable users, and after the first four years, all funds will be available for any user with the matching commitment through the application process.

Senate Amendment 1 clarifies the funding designation in the first four years, as well as specify that radio equipment purchased with this grant must be P-25 compliant but makes no further requirements for the type or brand of radio.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 218. I'm happy to answer any questions at this time.



Testimony on 2023 Senate Bill 218

Major General Paul Knapp, The Adjutant General

Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government

May 23, 2023

The Department of Military Affairs (DMA) is providing the following background information as related to Senate Bill 218, specifically the grant program's potential and positive impact on the transition to the future statewide public safety interoperable communication system.

Under current law, DMA is responsible for administering and overseeing the operation of the current and future statewide public safety interoperable communication systems. The existing system, called WISCOM, is currently operating on the VHF frequency band, which holds limitations. The future communication system is planned to transition to the 700/800 MHz frequency band which will eliminate the current VHF frequency band limitations.

Many local public safety agencies struggle to find funds to purchase new radios because of high costs, limited funding, and competing budgetary needs. It is common for local agencies to use their radios beyond the recommended lifecycle because of these financial constraints.

Although the new system does provide interoperable communication resources for VHF users who are unable to migrate to 700/800 MHz, for local public safety agencies to utilize the future system for daily use and dispatch, they would need radios that are capable of operating in the 700/800 MHz frequency. In most cases, local public safety agencies who are daily users of WISCOM would need to replace their existing radio fleet.

This bill creates a grant program that is imperative to helping local public safety agencies fund the upgrade of their mission essential radios. Additionally, language within the bill allows for the ability to coordinate grant funding with the timing of the system upgrade in each local area, which will ensure that local agencies are ready to transition to the new system, when the upgrade is implemented in their region. To be immediately successful, this program will require funding in the 2023 biennium to manage the fiscal needs.