

Letter of Support - HF 1814 - 03/11/25

March 11, 2025

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the committee:

I request your support of Statewide Public Safety Radio Communication System Equipment Grants; appropriation bill, HF 1814. This bill will help sustain the aging ARMER system and help to support the equipment needs throughout the State of Minnesota.

As employed by the Stevens County Sheriff's Office, I helped move this interoperable system forward in Stevens County. I currently serve as the Emergency Management Director for two counties in West Central MN, Stevens County since 2008 and Big Stone County, since 2016. Employed by the Stevens County Sheriff, I serve as the Local ARMER System Administrator and sit on many regional and statewide Emergency Services Board committees. Through this work, I see firsthand the need for continued funding throughout the region and state.

Stevens County and Big Stone County submitted applications and were both awarded funding from the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2024-2026 Allied Radio Matrix for Emergency Response (ARMER) Grant Program. This funding will greatly affect the response level and interoperability capabilities between our emergency services departments. Continued funding remains a concern for many departments. Important points from the 2024-2026 funding and some additional information about how this funding request began is noted below.

- In the 2023 legislative session, ECN received \$4 million in general funds for a new statewide public safety radio communication system equipment grant program.
- A match of 5 percent from non-state funds was required.
- There were 178 entities who applied to this grant.
- There were 77 applications selected for funding.
- Over \$23 million grant funds were requested.
- The average grant funding request was \$130,000.
- DPS-ECN in collaboration with stakeholders and ARMER subject matter experts scored and awarded the 2024-2026 grant applications based on the highest overall scores and the funding that was available.

On July 25, 2021, a 9 1 1 emergency call was made in the City of Clinton, in Big Stone County. The caller reported a large elevator fire. There were nineteen fire departments and seventeen other departments from multiple counties who supported the response over a two-day period. All responding fire departments were able to communicate over the 800 MHz ARMER radio system. All departments have radios purchased over 12 years ago, and some do not have enough radios to safely manage a large incident. Big Stone County and Stevens County are both fortunate to have been awarded funding from the State Fiscal Year 2024-2026 ARMER Equipment Grant Program. These small rural departments greatly appreciate the funding opportunity, and they are hopeful this funding will continue. Although numerous departments received funding, there continues to be hundreds who are in desperate need of funding for replacement radios.

Days after the incident in Big Stone County, Governor Walz, Congresswoman Fischbach, Senator Westrom and Representative Backer visited the location and heard concerns from local emergency services departments. A Fire Chief, who served as an incident commander during this

fire explained his concern of how small departments are unable to replace aging radios. He explained that the money they bring in by fundraising, due to their small tax base, is used to replace equipment that is needed to fight the fires. This same Fire Chief testified requesting funding for the 2024-2026 bill.

ARMER is the backbone of our public safety communication infrastructure. It's a priority to ensure that emergency services radios are up to date and able to provide interoperability for our EMS, first responders, firefighters, and law enforcement personnel.

This continued funding will:

- Maintain interoperability for our emergency response departments throughout the State of Minnesota.
- Allow funding for the emergency response departments who do not have an adequate funding source to replace the old or inoperable radios.
- Allow departments that may have an inadequate number of radios in their workforce to purchase additional radios. This will improve communication capabilities while enhancing responder safety when responding to a 9 1 1 call for help.

The following points provide awareness of the immediate need for funding throughout the State of Minnesota.

- Radios purchased years ago are at the end of support for the products, replacement parts cannot be purchased for the failing equipment.
- Replacement of ARMER radios range in price from \$2500-\$6500, depending on the model and need.
- Many local government units can only provide funding through their levies. This has a direct impact on the local taxpayers and an increase in local levies. Small rural emergency service departments do not have the levy authority to fund radio replacements.

I greatly appreciate the work that you all provide, please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Dona Greiner

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