



Dear Chair Mariani, Chair Limmer and Members of the Committee:

Stearns County is writing in support of HF 2821/SF 2670. We are writing to urge your support of this important public safety initiative.

Effective radios are the backbone of public safety in the State of Minnesota. Our first responders, firefighters, and law enforcement personnel depend upon them to effectively perform their jobs. Radios save lives and serve every constituent of the State of Minnesota.

Radios that serve the ARMER system are outdated in many jurisdictions. They are costly to maintain and replace. In local government units, where budgets are tight, it is very difficult to plan for the costly process of replacing this critical infrastructure. Local government units would urge the state to fund a grant program that allows for the critical upgrade of radios. We would also encourage a sustainable funding support to support ongoing replacement.

Another challenge to replacement radios is that replacing radios is a direct impact of our local taxpayers. Radios are critical to deploying resources, protecting property and life, and protecting our workers. However, they often get overlooked for replacement because there is no existing funding source.

In Stearns County, there are just over 1600 radios on the statewide ARMER system, most of these radios are used by our small rural emergency departments. There are 24 volunteer fire departments, 4 ambulance service, 3 hospitals, 10 police departments and the Sheriff's Office which includes our countywide dispatch center and Emergency Management Department.

Out of the 1600 radios in use by responders in Stearns County, there are approximately 993 radios that were purchased before year 2011. These radios are no longer supported by Motorola, and it is extremely difficult to find radio parts or used parts to fix or maintain the radios. Our emergency services departments rely on the ARMER radio system to provide the interoperability between the departments at the local, regional, State, and Federal levels.

The replacement cost for the radios that are at the end of their life expectancy, range from \$2,500 to \$4,800 each, this expense does not include the radio programming or additional equipment, or supplies required to add the radio onto the Statewide radio system. While Stearns County provides these services our public safety partners, many emergency response agencies in Minnesota incur additional costs of up to \$400 per radio.

Thank you for your consideration and time.

On behalf of the Stearns County Sheriff's Office,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Soyka", is written over the typed name.

Steve Soyka
Stearns County Sheriff