



County of Erie

MARK C. POLONCARZ
COUNTY EXECUTIVE

DEPARTMENT OF CENTRAL POLICE SERVICES

JOHN GLASCOTT
COMMISSIONER

October 2, 2013

Erie County Legislature
92 Franklin Street – 4th Floor
Buffalo, NY 14202

RE: Loss of Grant Assistance to Purchase Air Cards for Local Agencies

Dear Honorable Members:

Recently I received several requests asking for further explanation regarding the recent decision to stop supplying air cards to local law enforcement agencies. In short, the entire cost of these cards was always paid using Federal and New York State Homeland Security grants; however, such grant assistance has been reduced by at least forty percent (40%) since the air card program commenced. It is not economically feasible for the County to continue this program.

The County began to support a limited number of air cards in 2004. The cost of these cards was supported by a New York State Homeland Security grant, which, in turn, was funded through various Federal Homeland Security grants. Prior to the receipt of grant funding the County did not support air cards for local agencies.

In 2006, the State began the M/A-COM project. This project was meant to provide interoperability between police agencies in New York State. Included in that project, were provisions that would allow wireless connections for emergency services providers, thereby eliminating the need for an agency to utilize air cards to communicate with other agencies. A decision was made that until the M/A-COM project was completed, the County would continue to support air cards as long as Homeland Security grant funding was available to pay for the cost of the cards.

The M/A-COM project failed in 2008. Following failure of the project, Emergency Services, through the Homeland Security grant funds, continued to provide localities wireless air card access.

Both, the Commissioner of Emergency Services, Daniel Neaverth and I, have discussed before your Honorable Body the significant reduction in Homeland Security grant funding during recent years. It is my understanding that local emergency responders have been fully informed of these cutbacks in grant funding in recent years.

Furthermore, shortly after accepting this position in February 2012, after consultation with Commissioner Neaverth, I informed the Erie County Police Chiefs that the current support of air cards was not going to be financially sustainable. As we are now moving into the 2014 budget year preparation, and given the significant reduction of Homeland Security funding, I informed the Erie County Police Chiefs that Erie County would no longer be able to provide funding for municipal agencies with air cards after 2013.

We are currently spending about \$17,000.00 a month to support air cards for 35 municipalities, and other first responders; approximately \$204,000.00 annually. Furthermore, we do not support the wireless system in the City of Buffalo which is funded through the City's own budget.

Because of these grant cuts, the only way to continue the program would be for the County to absorb all costs of the program. The only way to avoid this would be to cut into currently funded local programs. For example, support of this program would reduce the County's ability to fund Phase 3 of the new E-911 system. If the E-911 program was not cut, then other areas of Public Safety would have to be cut to fund what is, in essence, already a local cost. In the end, what other needed emergency or police service, paid for by local share dollars, do we give up?

Furthermore still, we do not control the distribution of or use of the air cards in the current structure. This makes the program very difficult to manage. The distribution and use of the cards is (and should be) controlled by the possessing agency. By giving the responsibility back to the municipality for the cost of the program, I believe there will be better managerial control.

While I understand why local officials do not want to take on the additional cost associated with air cards, the County is not in a position to absorb this cost now that grant funding has been significantly cut. Instead of pleading to your Honorable Body to absorb the cost of these cards, local officials should lobby our Federal officials to seek increases in our Homeland Security grant funding to the levels of the recent past. Cuts in Federal and New York State programs matter and this is just one example of how cuts in Federal and State funding can impact at the local level.

If you have any further questions on this matter, please contact the undersigned at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely yours,



John Glascott, Commissioner

JG/cw

cc: Mark C. Poloncarz, County Executive
Daniel Neaverth, Jr., Commissioner of Emergency Services