

I am the President of Stamford Amateur Radio Association (SARA) in Stamford CT. I am writing to support Petition for Rulemaking RM-11699 to allow for encryption of certain amateur communications during emergency operations and related training exercises.

SARA actively participates in emergency communications operations with Stamford CERT (Community Emergency Response Team), local Red Cross, and local Salvation Army. During Hurricane Sandy, for example, we provided radio communications between three shelters (run by a mix of Red Cross and City personnel), local Salvation Army (which had responsibility for feeding the evacuees), the Stamford Emergency Operations Center, the Stamford/Darien Red Cross Chapter House, and the regional Red Cross operations center in Bridgeport CT.

We have had discussions with the City's hospital (Stamford Hospital) about providing backup communications between the hospital and several outlying medical facilities in nearby towns, but those discussions have broken down over the issue of encryption.

All of the organizations we deal with, including the City of Stamford itself, would prefer it if certain of our communications could be encrypted. Obviously, patient-identifiable medical information is the first thing that comes to mind. However, there is other operational data where encryption is also desired - such as certain aspects of shelter status and certain specifics of CERT operations. In one recent exercise, for example, we were providing communications for Stamford CERT on our repeater during a simulated search for an Alzheimer's patient who had wandered away from a group home. Stamford police would have preferred it if we could have used encryption when transmitting descriptive information about the person, as well as in transmitting updates of where the person had been reportedly seen.

I would have no problem if the authorization for use of encryption was limited to amateurs who have specific associations with public service organizations such as CERT or public welfare organizations such as Red Cross. All of the amateurs in our organization who are likely to transmit encrypted information for emergency communications are sworn members of CERT (which requires training and criminal background checks) and/or enrolled volunteers in Red Cross (who are also subject to training and background check requirements).