Short Project Summary

The City of Merced respectfully requests $3 million in Congressionally Directed Spending for the Merced Police Department Radio Communications Modernization Project. This one-time capital investment will replace obsolete radio infrastructure and integrate the Department into the countywide interoperable public safety radio system operated by the Merced County Sheriff's Office. The project strengthens regional interoperability, disaster readiness, and first responder safety in a critical Central California gateway corridor serving Yosemite National Park and other federally managed lands.

History of the Project

The Merced Police Department's existing radio system is outdated and no longer provides reliable, standards-based coverage across the City. As population growth, visitor traffic, and public safety demands have increased, communication limitations have become more frequent and operationally significant.

In response to regional needs, the Sheriff's Office developed a countywide interoperable radio network supporting multiple local agencies. The City of Merced, home to the county's largest population and highest call volume, has not yet been integrated into this shared system. Full regional interoperability requires the City's participation.

Current Status of the Project

The City has completed coordination with the Sheriff's Office and identified all infrastructure, equipment, and integration requirements necessary to join the countywide system. The project is implementation ready upon receipt of funding.

Significant portions of the City and surrounding response corridors contain persistent radio dead zones where officers cannot reliably reach dispatch or request immediate assistance. These communication failures affect daily operations and multi-agency emergency response. During wildfires, major traffic collisions, evacuations, and other rapidly evolving incidents, gaps in radio coverage delay backup and medical aid, reduce situational awareness, and require officers to operate without a secure and dependable safety link. These vulnerabilities are especially concerning along Highways 99, 140, and 41, which serve as primary travel routes to Yosemite National Park.

This project represents a one-time capital investment and will not create an ongoing federal funding obligation.

Population Served

The project directly serves the City of Merced and supports a regional population exceeding 300,000 residents across Merced County and neighboring jurisdictions. As a primary gateway to Yosemite National Park, Merced experiences substantial visitor traffic traveling through federally significant transportation corridors. Reliable interoperable communications are essential to coordinated wildfire response, evacuation management, search and rescue operations, and broader disaster preparedness involving local, state, and federal partners.

Evaluation of Success

Success will be evaluated through measurable improvements in elimination or substantial reduction of documented radio dead zones, system coverage testing meeting public safety reliability standards, seamless interoperability during joint and mutual aid operations, and improved communication performance during large scale incidents.

The intended outcome is faster response, stronger regional coordination, enhanced disaster resilience, and improved officer safety.

Detailed Budget Total Request $3 million

Communications Center Infrastructure Upgrade $ 1 million
Dispatch console modernization, core radio system replacement, secure network integration, programming, encryption configuration, testing, and installation services.

Portable Radios $ 1 million
Replacement of outdated portable radios with interoperable multiband units, including programming, batteries, chargers, and essential accessories.

Vehicle Radios and Mobile Command Enhancements $ 1 million
Replacement of mobile radios in patrol vehicles and upgrades to the regional mobile command post to support disaster response, evacuation coordination, and large-scale emergencies.