

Protest filed in duel over sheriff's radio contract

By **KEN KNIGHT**
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TAMPA — A radio message goes out to sheriff's deputies about fleeing bank robbers shooting at pursuing officers. A decision must be made.

Do dispatchers commandeer one of the sheriff's two voice frequencies for the chase? Or, do they keep the radio channels open for routine communication?

It's a dilemma that Hillsborough sheriff's dispatchers have faced on several occasions in the past two decades.

But during the past year, Hillsborough County has become one of a growing number of counties committed to acquiring better and faster communications for deputies, firefighters and paramedics.

The sheriff's office plans to scrap the county's existing 20-year-

old radio system for a new state-of-the-art network.

The new system, designed to link and expand radio communications between sheriff's dispatchers and street deputies, is expected to cost about \$19 million.

Two companies, Ericsson GE Mobile Communications Inc. and Motorola Communications & Electronics Inc., are in fierce competition to win the pact. They are the two primary manufacturers of the systems.

The battle heated up last week when a technical review panel recommended Ericsson GE. Motorola filed a protest Friday, sparking the county to suspend the selection process.

Motorola lobbyist Todd Pressman said there were flaws in the technical report: "We feel it's problem plagued."

Alex Small of Ericsson GE said

the unique nature of his company's system made the difference.

Local lobbyists hired by both companies embroiled in the competition are trying to line up support for their clients.

Some commissioners, who will eventually award the contract, say they have already been lobbied by representatives of the companies.

But Commissioner Joe Chillura said the lobbying wouldn't impact his vote: "A lobbyist being involved at this juncture is of no consequence."

The winning proposal hinges on performance criteria and cost, not politics, he said.

Chillura and Commissioner Syl-



Pressman

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