

OFFICIAL TESTIMONY
OF
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FOR A HEARING ON

“Engaging the Community: Perspectives on School Security”

BEFORE THE
United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery
of the House Committee on Homeland Security

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[INTRODUCTION]

Chairman Payne and Ranking Member King, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

It is an honor to speak with you and share the work my Office is doing to keep the residents and visitors of New Jersey safe, especially with regard to educational institutions.

The New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness (NJOHSP) is tasked with coordinating counterterrorism, resiliency, and cybersecurity efforts across all levels of government, law enforcement, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector. NJOHSP is charged with bolstering New Jersey's resources for counterterrorism, critical infrastructure protection, preparedness, training, and federal grants management.

New Jersey faces a complex, diverse, and fluid security environment with real, pervasive, and evolving threats. However, attacks against children and staff in what should be the safe haven of education is perhaps the most jarring threat we face. Recent incidents at schools in Parkland, Florida, and Santa Fe, Texas, serve as stark reminders that schools are often targeted by those seeking to commit acts of violence. Law enforcement in our own State of New Jersey—with the assistance of authorities in Delaware—prevented a potential school shooting this past June when they arrested a man possessing a loaded firearm and additional ammunition at an elementary school in Westfield.

The safety of our children and those charged with their care are paramount. We must do all that is necessary to provide students and staff with a sense of comfort and security in their learning environments, and parents and guardians deserve the peace of mind that their children will return to them at the end of the school day. For that reason, all State leaders are in sync on combining our resources to ensure the protection of our children.

[NJOHSP ACTIONS]

NJOHSP's work to protect our students would not be possible without the strong partnerships our Office has with the New Jersey Department of Education, New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, New Jersey Office of Emergency Management, community members, and local, State, and federal law enforcement agencies.

Our Office is proud of the collaborative progress we continue to make as a State in strengthening security throughout all our institutions, including in education. However, we recognize that our work is never complete, and continual improvement is the only way to succeed at protecting New Jersey and the country. While we provide details on our ongoing efforts, be mindful that we always seek to improve our approach toward preventing these incidents from occurring in the first place.

A focus on prevention is key in stopping an incident before it starts and avoiding the need to employ response tactics. It is our goal to be first preventers instead of just first responders and make certain our communities embrace a culture of preparedness that invests equally in both practices.

Following the tragic shooting at a high school in Parkland, Florida, in February 2018, heightened awareness from citizens and law enforcement—combined with the New Jersey Attorney General Directive of March 26, 2018, that calls for local law enforcement agencies who receive tips about suspicious activity related to terrorism or threatened acts of violence, including toward schools, to immediately notify their County Counterterrorism Coordinator and our Office’s Counterterrorism Watch Unit—led to an unprecedented increase in school-related reports to the New Jersey Suspicious Activity Reporting System.

As a result of this surge in school-related suspicious activity reports, our Office analyzed these incidents last year and shared recommendations through an intelligence report that included input from the New Jersey Department of Education and the Regional Operations Intelligence Center, the State’s fusion center. The report, distributed to school and police officials statewide and briefed to hundreds of law enforcement and school security specialists, resulted in improvements to our reporting system to allow for more standardized and faster analysis and expeditious action to mitigate threats.

Additionally, our Office, along with the FBI Newark Field Office, created high-level thresholds and notification protocols to ensure that all “threat to life” leads, particularly ones that involve schools, are immediately actioned to the appropriate municipal, county, State, and federal law enforcement entities.

We will continue to prioritize the identification of suspicious activity, as well as ensure there is a clear path for reporting and addressing issues before an incident can occur.

We will expand innovative efforts through such measures as training school personnel—including administrators, faculty, school resource officers, Special Law Enforcement Officers, custodians, and bus drivers—and the community as a whole on how to recognize and report suspicious activity.

We will continue to work alongside the Department of Education to help school leadership address school threats and the importance of reporting suspicious activity with students and their parents and guardians.

We remain committed to a whole-of-government approach, working with other departments and agencies within the State administration to provide comprehensive active shooter response training, including ways to spot pre-incident indicators and pathways to report those indicators.

Our partners in the New Jersey State Police, Department of Education, Department of Human Services, Department of Health, Department of Children and Families have achieved tremendous success as they built response capabilities that are second to none.

NJOHSP also collaborated with the Department of Education and University Hospital to provide in-person training for school safety specialists and to distribute more than 18,000 bleed control kits to school districts throughout the State.

Through unannounced active shooter drills across the State, we can test and gauge the effectiveness of both plans and actions of faculty and staff in an environment that is controlled, but realistic. We also continue to conduct large-scale active shooter exercises for K-12 schools.

Expanding security capabilities is an ongoing focus, with particular attention paid to mass gatherings; understanding common vulnerabilities of these areas and events where large numbers of people gather; and ensuring that everyone, including schoolchildren, know what actions to take if they face emergency situations.

With that in mind, New Jersey colleges and universities participate in quarterly Mass Gathering Working Group meetings aimed at identifying and addressing those common vulnerabilities and filling any capability gaps at locations where students gather throughout the State.

We want to not only make certain that we reinforce security measures of buildings, but also that those inside the buildings are empowered to safely respond to any incident. Training models and traditional planning assumptions must continue to expand in accordance with changing tactics and afford the capability to deviate from plans in the event of an unexpected scenario.

We created a School Security Subcommittee on the State's Domestic Security Preparedness Task Force, which I chair, to coordinate best practices across State agencies and integrate with national priorities and local needs. Members of the Subcommittee include the New Jersey Department of Education's Office of Student Support Services, University Hospital, the US Department of Homeland Security, and the FBI.

In 2018, with a grant from the Bureau of Justice Assistance STOP School Violence Prevention and Mental Health Training Program, the Department of Education and the New Jersey Department of Human Services Disaster and Terrorism Branch, in partnership with Sandy Hook Promise, facilitated training programs to schools across the State that focus on identifying warning signs of violence and taking action before an incident occurs.

Lastly, NJOHSP and the New Jersey State Police, in coordination with county and local partners, conduct physical security assessments at schools, as well as provide training to local law enforcement agencies to increase the capability to conduct assessments across the State.

NJOHSP is currently developing a methodology to conduct common vulnerability analyses from the physical school security assessment findings.

[NJCCIC ACTIONS]

The New Jersey Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Cell (NJCCIC), a component organization within NJOHSP, is charged with leading and coordinating New Jersey's cybersecurity efforts while building resiliency to cyber threats throughout the State.

In March 2019, the NJCCIC hosted a Cybersecurity Symposium for public-sector organizations, including those with limited cybersecurity resources, such as school systems and districts. The purpose of this conference was to provide attendees with practical strategies, tactics, resources,

and tools to help manage cyber risk in their respective organizations and become more resilient to cyber attacks. One key takeaway from the symposium was hearing from IT administrators in school systems about lacking cybersecurity resources.

Over the past year, the NJCCIC has conducted 26 Cybersecurity Threat and Risk Mitigation Briefings for K-12 and higher education schools throughout New Jersey. In October, NJCCIC Director Michael Geraghty is providing a cybersecurity briefing at the annual New Jersey School Boards Association conference.

Over the past two years, the NJCCIC has received and/or responded to 166 cybersecurity incidents (38 in 2018 and 128 to date in 2019) affecting New Jersey K-12 schools and higher education institutions. The NJCCIC is continuously working to encourage institutions to report incidents so that we may identify patterns and trends, as well as provide risk mitigation strategies that would help the school community at large thwart emerging threats.

[H.R. 6920, THE “SCHOOL SECURITY IS HOMELAND SECURITY GRANT ACT OF 2018”]

One of the biggest safety and security challenges facing many educational institutions throughout New Jersey is funding. While the importance of enhancing security efforts and resources is shared by all, it is often difficult for schools to make the necessary financial commitment to provide both appropriate and effective safety measures for their facilities.

Legislation introduced by Chairman Payne—H.R. 6920, The “School Security is Homeland Security Grant Act of 2018”—would provide dedicated federal funding under current grant funding programs of at least \$90 million every year that is earmarked strictly for school security.

This funding would greatly assist schools throughout the country, including New Jersey, in enhancing the presence of security personnel at their facilities and in the acquisition of target hardening equipment to secure those facilities.

This added resource would enable schools to meet the very goals we have set out to achieve in the areas of prevention and response. Through added security equipment, personnel, and trainings, schools would increase their preparedness level exponentially to confront threats.

[CONCLUSION]

While mass gathering events and areas provide numerous benefits to the public, such as fun, valuable learning experiences and a sense of community, we cannot overlook the need for safety and security in these areas. Those who wish to do harm at a heightened scale will continually target these types of locations. Schools, colleges, and universities are included in this trend and must remain a constant focus as we look to secure mass gathering facilities that also encompass amusement parks, arenas, casinos, and stadiums.

Efforts such as the Mass Gathering Working Group, community outreach initiatives, and the countless trainings and exercises our Office conducts each year highlight that we will do all that

is necessary to ensure the safety and security of the residents and visitors throughout New Jersey, protecting them from terrorist threats to our public spaces.

We remain dedicated to continuing these efforts; to further collaborating with our law enforcement partners at the local, county, State, and federal levels; and to work toward addressing threats with a focus on prevention.

Chairman Payne, Ranking Member King, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, I thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

I look forward to your questions and yield back to the Chairman.