



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Joint Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) *Unmanned Aerial Systems: An Examination of the Use of Drones in Emergency Response*

May 16, 2024

In honor of Police Week, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to our first responder witnesses for their dedication and commitment to keeping our communities safe. Thank you for your service.

Turning to the topic of today's hearing, Unmanned aerial systems (UAS), also known as drones, were first used by the military to gather intelligence. More recently, law enforcement agencies and fire departments have found drones to be helpful in an emergency response capacity.

Drones can be used to monitor crimes in progress, traffic accidents, residential fires, and wildfires at a larger scale – a role usually served by crewed aircraft. Drones can carry camera systems capable of thermal imaging for search and rescue missions, as well as radio equipment and other sensors.

First responders across the country have recognized that drones can be a useful tool in advancing their public safety missions while reducing risk to personnel and the public. In short, the biggest advantage of drones for first responders is the ability to go where humans cannot. In my home state of Mississippi, we have found drones useful for surveying the damage wrought by disasters, such as the devastating tornadoes that ravaged my district in 2023, killing 22 people.

While drones can be helpful for emergency response missions, some have understandably raised concerns that law enforcement's use of drones could infringe upon individuals' privacy or free speech rights—such as in situations where law enforcement fly drones over First Amendment-protected activities.

It is imperative that Americans' constitutional rights are upheld when first responders use drones to enhance public safety. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about drones and how they are used for emergency response operations, and any recommendations they may have to strengthen this technology.

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