



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Emergency Management & Technology Subcommittee Ranking Member Troy Carter (D-LA)

Securing our Nation from WMDs: A Review of the Department of Homeland Security's Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office

March 20, 2024

CWMD and OHS play a crucial role in fortifying our Nation's defenses against threats that could pose considerable harm to our communities. CWMD improves our Nation's capability to plan for, detect, and guard against chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) threats. OHS is the central office that serves as the principal medical, workforce health and safety, and public health authority for the 260,000 Department of Homeland Security employees.

Pursuant to the CWMD Act of 2018 the office was set to sunset on December 21, 2023, but the sunset was subsequently extended and is now set to expire when the continuing resolution expires, which is on Friday. I want to thank Chairman D'Esposito for working on a bipartisan front to reauthorize CWMD. I am a proud cosponsor of his bill, H.R.3324, the "Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Extension Act of 2023." As authorizers, we should do our part to make sure that all programs and offices have support and there is no question as to whether this office or any other office that protects the Nation from threats, has an uncertain future.

CWMD operates critical programs, like Securing the Cities (STC), which provides 14 local governments, including New Orleans—my home, with detection equipment, training, exercise support, operational and technical subject matter expertise, and programmatic support. STC is working with New Orleans to prepare for Super Bowl LIX (59) and continues to support important events such as Mardi Gras. To ensure such work is not hindered, I introduced H.R. 4403, the "Securing the Cities Improvement Act," which passed the House earlier this month. My bill would help cities build and maintain their security capabilities against nuclear or radiological threats. I look forward to discussing STC's impact on domestic preparedness.

While CWMD is doing great work, one concern that I have seen highlighted repeatedly in the Partnership for Public Service and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports is internal morale issues. One GAO report highlighted that the merger of predecessor offices under CWMD caused low morale and that the Office's missions were unclear under the new structure. Some employees had difficulty understanding how their missions should align under the new structure.

However, a more recent GAO report has highlighted that CWMD is working on its workforce morale. I want to thank GAO for their work on helping the Committee understand how this new office is functioning. I look forward to hearing today how CWMD has improved workforce morale.

OHS is also an integral part of the Department and was formerly part of CWMD until 2022. As a separate component, OHS optimizes the health, wellness, and safety of the DHS workforce and enhances efforts to counter health threats that pose a risk to our Nation. In recent years, they have managed medical and public health initiatives that have helped thousands of people resettling in the United States through

Operations Allies Welcome and Uniting for Ukraine. It is imperative to recognize and support the critical work carried out by both CWMD and OHS in securing our homeland.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today regarding the recent Fiscal Year 2025 budget request and any additional concerns or successes the offices would like to discuss.

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